

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM WITHIN AN UNABASHEDLY SEXUALLY ACTIVE  
POSTMODERN COLLEGIATE CULTURE

THESIS-PROJECT

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To the students who participated in this research project and all those whom they represent. You were never a project to me but special people simply looking for what we all want: love, honor, and forgiveness. In all your endeavors may you find the inexplicable intimacy found only in the Christ who longs to impart to you his life on your life journey

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
NIV	New International Version
PID	Pelvic Inflammatory Disease
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease

## **ABSTRACT**

The author's goal in completing this thesis-project was to discover an effective means of evangelizing college students who are unabashedly sexually active. Sexual promiscuity has many physical, emotional, and spiritual ramifications, which may affect how today's students hear the Christian message and how those wishing to share the message should tailor their evangelistic efforts.

All students who participated in this study took a confidential online survey. Several preliminary questions ascertained the students' demographic information, religious beliefs, and sexual histories. The students then viewed four videos highlighting aspects of life and spirituality. Lastly, they answered questions that helped the researcher evaluate the impact of the video content on the students' degrees of openness to the gospel.

An analysis of the students' responses revealed statistically significant data, supporting the idea that a new means of evangelizing – one that accounts for the students' particular experiences, needs, and desires – will be more effective among postmodern college students who are unabashedly sexually active than other common evangelistic methods.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM AND THE SETTING

From what wineskin is the fragrant wine of the centuries-old gospel to be poured for the current post-modern culture? This work will address the means by which Christ's gospel is effectively communicated in a post-modern context to a collegiate culture that is unabashedly sexually active. A statistical analysis of the sexual behavior of 18-24 year-old college students provides a foundation on which one can understand the physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual consequences experienced in this subculture.

This intriguing segment of society is in desperate need of hearing, understanding and internalizing the gospel of Jesus Christ to overcome misconceptions now deeply ingrained in its mind. The exploration of the mind, the heart and the behavior of "emerging adults" provides a strategy for effectively communicating the gospel to them at their level of need and their level of receptivity.

No one would dispute the fact that college students struggle in life like anyone else. To conclude that all college students have difficulty living morally balanced lives is an overgeneralization. Surely there are many "emerging adults" in this generation that seek to practice a biblically based morality. Yet, there are many who have great difficulty establishing identity, direction and a fruitful sense of morality and absolute truth.

In the 1980s and 1990s began a widespread diffusion and powerful influence of the theories of post-structuralism and postmodernism in the U.S. culture.<sup>1</sup> This twenty-year period provided a transition from modernism to postmodernism. Essayist Wendell

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 15.

Berry has provided accurate insight into the relationship between the human body and the human soul. The moral individualism and moral relativism that exist among many emerging adults has fostered a level of sexual promiscuity that is physically and spiritually problematic. Ongoing sexual liaisons and polyamory have contributed to a spiritual deprivation among this segment of society. What is outwardly perceived in this culture as liberating is in actuality spiritually restrictive. Berry writes, “There is a paradox in all this, and it is as cruel as it is obvious: as the emphasis on individual liberty has increased, the liberty and power of most individuals has declined.”<sup>2</sup>

In the 1960s and 70s, sexuality was daring and rebellious, a form of “love” outside committed relationships. Sexuality was seen in the context of a revolution. Emerging adults today inherit and perpetuate a culture that is highly sexualized but in a casual and sometimes chaotic way.<sup>3</sup>

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett identifies five distinguishing features that universally characterize the post-adolescent journey experienced by college students. “It is the age of identity exploration. It is the age of instability. It is the most self-focused age of life. It is the age of feeling in-between, in transition. It is the age of possibilities, when hope flourishes, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.”<sup>4</sup>

Life in this culture is neither simple nor simplistic. Students want answers that yield tangible, transformative results.

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<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, “The Body and the Earth in the Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture” *Present Truth Magazine*, January 8, 1996, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XXXVIII/38-6.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 148.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

Each generation possesses a unique social and spiritual context. No longer is a belief in God or the authority of Scripture or the deity of Christ a prevalent norm. To effectively provide the gospel to this subculture, one must implement proper “missiological contextualization.”<sup>5</sup> Christ knew his audience, and so must today’s church. It is imperative that the gospel be effectively communicated to every aspect of culture regardless of its worldview. Christ’s admonition was to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”<sup>6</sup> Christ is the model for communicating with all segments of culture. Jesus is the master of communicating with people of varying ages, races, mindsets and religion. Christ’s personal model of ministry dispensed truth equally to every subculture with exquisite uniqueness. Therefore, the thrust of this work is to establish and measure an effective means of communicating Christ’s gospel to the college students of today’s culture in all their uniqueness. The current generation outwardly appears to thirst more for anything or anyone than it does Christ. In the context of “moral relativism,” emerging adults are now forming an identity in the context of a cultural immersion in sexual immorality.

### **The Prevalence of Sexual Activity Among 18-24 Year-Old College Students**

Technological advances in birth control eventually impacted the college culture.<sup>7</sup> In recent decades, sex has become casual and recreational. Sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and herpes have become widespread concerns.

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<sup>5</sup> Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 14.

The in-depth interview approach that Dr. Christian Smith of Notre Dame used in his national study provides the necessary insight into the heart of the sexually active emerging adult. Smith's national survey reveals that the "sexual freedom" in this postmodern collegiate culture is often accompanied by real hurt, confusion, grief, anger and regrets.<sup>8</sup> At the center of this subculture is a high degree of sexual promiscuity that has its genesis in the earlier years of adolescence. The typical never-married twenty-three year old has had three oral sex partners and three sexual intercourse partners.<sup>9</sup>

The degree to which college students are engaged in sexual activity is astounding. Seventy-three percent of students have had sexual intercourse, 13% of those have engaged in that activity "one or a few times," 21%, "several times," and 65% "many times." The average age for first losing one's virginity is sixteen years old.<sup>10</sup> In fact, about 25% of males and 12% of females in their late twenties have had fifteen or more sexual partners, representing a "diverse" history of sexual experiences (heterosexual and homosexual, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

Culturally speaking, emerging adults have developed a specific vernacular to describe the aforementioned sexual activity. "Hooking up" refers to a physical encounter between two people who are essentially strangers but become "friends with benefits." Many college students have advanced their "sexual resume" by "hooking up." Inherent to "hooking up" is a casual expectedness; there is no connotation of audacity, daring or

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<sup>8</sup> Smith and Snell, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, 149.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 275.

<sup>11</sup> Marla E. Eisenberg with Christiana van Hippel, "Sex in Emerging Adulthood: A Decade in the Sexual Gap," June, 2014, accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.changingsea.net.essays/Eisenberg.pdf>.

wildness.” Hooking up isn’t a rebellious, anti-establishment act but more a natural part of life for a large segment of this culture.<sup>12</sup>

Virtual sexual encounters can also lead to physical sexual encounters. Being “sextd” is to receive an electronic, sexually suggestive invitation to “get together” using words or electronic pictures. This phenomenon is not to be confused with be “sexiled,” which is a term describing a roommate that has been exiled from the dorm room because of a dorm mate’s sexual liaison.<sup>13</sup>

All forms of technology are used as a means to engage in sexual activity. Eighty-seven percent of university students are having virtual sex over webcams, instant messenger or cell phones.<sup>14</sup>

### **Emotional Effects of Sexual Promiscuity Among College Students**

The apparent pleasure and recreation perceived to be taking place in culture is not always the inner reality of those involved. Based on the startling statistics noted above, many students, both male and female, have to deal with the guilt and remorse associated with sexual promiscuity, as well as the potential real life consequences associated with sexual polyamory. The college student today is apparently on a quest for meaning and purpose, a quest that is taking the promiscuous student to great lengths to secure that emotional stability. Unfortunately the destination, while sexy in appearance, fails to provide a balanced sense of well-being.

As students seek to meet the inner needs of the human soul, the casual sexual

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 153.

<sup>14</sup> John P. Splinter, “Biblical Sexuality, Part 1; Pornography: A Cancer Killing Our Nation,” January 5, 2010, accessed December 16, 2014, <http://www.purehope.net/stlouisArticlesDetail.asp?id=187>.

relationship leaves them that much more in an emotional deficit. “Sexiness is no longer about being arousing or alluring, it’s about being worthwhile....”<sup>15</sup> “Sexually Transmitted Diseases are always a concern. A rapidly increasing number of girls suffer from depression.”<sup>16</sup> “I consider depression in teenage girls an STD, because it is almost always linked to underage sex.”<sup>17</sup> “Engaging in sex puts girls at higher risk for depression.”<sup>18</sup>

The casualness of sex among college students in the “hook up” culture has profound effects on the well-being of participants. Those who engage in casual sexual relationship and experiences experience the negative effects of a lower self-esteem. College students with a history of involvement in casual sex (sex outside of committed relationships) reported lower self-esteem than students who had been involved in only committed sexual relationships and individuals who did not engage in sexual behaviors.<sup>19</sup> While it is possible that those with low self-esteem are more prone to engage in casual sex, it is undeniable that such sexual behavior does nothing to enhance one’s self esteem.<sup>20</sup> Students engaging in casual sex experience higher levels of regret, shame and anger.<sup>21</sup> The sexual behavior of college students often has lasting, potentially irreversible consequences that are physical, psychological, social and spiritual in nature.

Most emerging adults approach sexual activity with the mindset that their sexual involvement is a necessary key to ascertaining their sexual identity and their personal preferences concerning sex. This is obviously not postured to be a time of long term

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<sup>15</sup> Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, (New York: Free Press, 2005), 313.

<sup>16</sup> Levy, 103.

<sup>17</sup> Levy, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Denise Halfors, "Which comes first in Adolescence: Sex and Drugs or Depression?" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 29 (2005): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Paul, Elizabeth L., McManus, Brian, and Hayes, Allison. ‘Hookup’: Characteristics and Correlates of College Students’ Spontaneous and Anonymous Sexual Experiences.” *The Journal of Sex Research* Volume 37, Issue 1 (2000): 76-88.

<sup>20</sup> Paul, McManus, and Hayes (2000): 76-88.

<sup>21</sup> Paul, McManus, and Hayes (2000): 76-88.



relational commitment. Having said this, those most emotionally hurt are women. Female students want to experiment towards an eventual marriage but regret the ramifications of being left and used.<sup>22</sup> In the wake of a sexually active college career, males are left to deal with possible STDs, addictions to pornography, financial implications of unwanted children and marriages initiated more by guilt than love.

Unwanted sexual advances are yet another great source of physical and psychological pain and regret. The perceived “recreational” aspect of sexual activity on college campuses is not always recreational and welcomed. Approximately 25% of all college women in the United States have experienced rape or attempted rape during their college careers or have experienced vaginal or anal intercourse as a result of continuous arguments or pressure. Furthermore, two-thirds of all rape victims between the ages of 18 and 29 had a prior relationship with the rapist.<sup>23</sup> The “hook up” mentality in culture has its blatantly obvious dark side that can and does create deep emotional scarring for years to come.

This emotional quandary describes the paradox that exists among emerging adults. On one hand, most are very optimistic about their overall future, but at the same time, some are bewildered about their present.

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnie Fisher, Francis Cullen and Michael Turner, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2000, Publication No. 182369), 166.

## **Unwanted Pregnancies and Abortions**

Emerging adults by nature are optimistic about their futures. Inherent to college academic studies is the expectation of a future graduation and the future accomplishment of contributing to society via a newly earned degree.

College is about hope and promise. An unwanted pregnancy is certainly a threat to that promise. Statistically speaking, it is a reality that female students are electing to continue the quest for a future without the “burden” of an unwanted child. Again, sexual promiscuity has its long lasting consequences. Students often choose to deal with unwanted pregnancies by aborting their babies. In 2012, 20-24 year old women accounted for 32.8% of all abortions in the United States.<sup>24</sup>

## **Sexually Transmitted Diseases, HIV/AIDS**

All emotional affects aside, sexual promiscuity on college campuses can and does yield great physical ramifications that impact a portion of this sexually charged demographic well into adult life.

Every year, 9.5 million 15-24 year olds are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, representing half of the sexually transmitted diseases in the United States in any given year.<sup>25</sup> This relatively small representation of the entire sexually active “adult” population must deal with the physical, social and emotional ramifications of sexually transmitted diseases without the fully developed maturity to do so.<sup>26</sup> Chlamydia, the most

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<sup>24</sup> Pazol, Karen, PhD, Andreea A. Creanga, MD, PhD, Kim D. Burley, Denise J. Jamieson, MD, “Morbidity and Morality Weekly Report: Abortion Surveillance,” November 28, 2014, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6311a1.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> H. Weinstock, S. Berman and W. Cates, Jr., 24, “Sexually Transmitted Diseases Among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 36 (2000): 6-10.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, 163.

common STD among college students, can also cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), which in turn can cause infertility. Twenty-five percent of men and nearly 75% of women contract the disease during a single episode of intercourse with an infected partner.<sup>27</sup> While this disease and others are treatable with antibiotics in the short term, some decisions to engage in casual sex do lead to life-long sickness issues.

Herpes is another highly infectious disease being dealt with by college students. Seventy-five percent of persons who have unprotected sexual contact with an infected person contract the disease. Treatment can best deal with symptoms within four days of infection, thus lessening the recurrence of future symptoms, but for herpes there is no cure; it is a lifetime dilemma to be addressed in all future relationships.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1940s, syphilis was easily contracted, but it occurred less often because strict social codes concerning premarital sex existed. Today, however, emerging adults are far more independent from their parents. They are a generation facing the absence of a cultural taboo concerning premarital sex. Therefore, HIV/AIDS is a reality of far greater likelihood than in previous generations.<sup>29</sup> Nearly half of women ages 20-24 are infected with HPV (a sexually transmitted virus).<sup>30</sup> There are those who live in denial and those who seek to pursue sexual pleasure in a manner that excludes precaution, but the prevailing attitude is a different story. “Most emerging adults say that fear of AIDS has become the framework for their sexual consciousness. Among college students, most say

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Arnett, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Eisenberg.

they talk with their partners about HIV prevention, and they name fear of HIV infection as their main motive for using condoms consistently.”<sup>31</sup>

The advent of HIV/AIDS does have a good side. The increase of protected sex has affected the frequency of unwanted pregnancies. Throughout the 1990s, there were steady declines in unintended pregnancies, abortions and births among unwed mothers as well as STDs among young people.<sup>32</sup> This trend is encouraging, but it does not negate the cause for alarm regarding the sexual behaviors of today’s emerging adults. A substantial portion of sexually active college students still take occasional unprotected risks. Recent studies show that from 25% to 33% of college students have had unprotected sex at least once in the last year.<sup>33</sup>

### **Scientific Views Regarding Sexual Promiscuity and the Human Body**

Science has established a viewpoint regarding the human body and the largest and most powerful sex organ, the human brain.<sup>34</sup> A scientific, physiological understanding of neurochemicals in the human brain provide a greater understanding of the devastation in culture regarding sexual immorality as described in the Bible. “Thanks to breakthroughs in neuroscience research techniques, scientists have been able to literally view the activity of the brain as it functions. With state of the art mapping and imaging tools, researchers have unlocked a new world of data on what happens between your ears each day.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Arnett, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Arnett, 92.

<sup>33</sup> Arnett, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Joe S. McIlhaney and Freda McKissic Bush, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing), 2008.

<sup>35</sup> P. F. Horan, J. Phillips, and N. Hagen. “The Meaning of Abstinence for College Students,” *Journal of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Education for Adolescents and Children* 2, no. 2 (1998): 51-66.

The brain, as a sex organ, can become physiologically dependent upon neurochemicals such as dopamine, oxytocin and vasopressin. “Dopamine has great influence on human behavior. This neurochemical washes over the brain fostering a sensation of excitement and reward. Dopamine rewards risky, exciting behavior and provides courage in the pursuit of future exciting behaviors.”<sup>36</sup>

Risky and exciting behavior among emerging adults encompasses activities such as sexual activity and experimentation, dangerous extreme sports, fast driving, video game competition, and even activities associated with gambling. Adolescents that engage in risky behavior experience a rush or a feeling of accomplishment. A dopamine rush is influential because the feeling of exhilaration can overwhelm an accurate calculation of the risk involved with the behavior.<sup>37</sup> The pleasure experienced because of dopamine can and does overshadow appropriate decision making that would protect one from sexually transmitted diseases, suicidal thoughts, unwanted sexual advances and unwanted pregnancies. As an alcoholic acquires a higher than normal tolerance of alcohol, so too a habitual risk taker acquires a higher than normal thrill threshold. Eventually more dopamine is needed to experience equivalent results.<sup>38</sup>

There is a noble purpose to dopamine’s functionality. Dopamine in the human body is key in that it fosters the desire between a male and female to desire one another and procreate. Sex is the strongest producer of dopamine.<sup>39</sup> Science provides an understanding of the power of sexuality when one neurochemical works in concert with another neurochemical.

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<sup>36</sup> McIlhaney, 31.

<sup>37</sup> L.P. Spear, “The Adolescent Brain and Age-Related Behavioral Manifestations,” *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 24 (2000) 4: 147.

<sup>38</sup> Spear, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Broadway, 2006), 147.

Oxytocin is present in both males and females but more prevalent in females.<sup>40</sup>

There are four main behaviors that generate the activity of oxytocin. When a female engages in safe, intimate physical contact with a male, oxytocin is released, fostering a sense of bonding and trust. In a female, intimate touching and embracing leads to a level of trust that can and does lead to sexual intercourse. Oxytocin is also a key factor in both breast-feeding and the uterine contractions that occur during labor. The purpose of oxytocin is to facilitate birth but also to foster a sense of nearness and intimacy between a mother and her infant.<sup>41</sup> “Oxytocin, like dopamine is ‘value neutral’. This neurochemical does not discriminate between bonding with one person over another. Oxytocin can and does foster bonding in a woman to a man that exhibits controlling, abusive and or possessive behavior.”<sup>42</sup>

A repeated pattern of bonding and trusting related to physical intimacy creates painful emotions when sexual relationships last only for short periods of time.<sup>43</sup> The human body grows accustomed to the excitement and euphoria of risk taking at the expense of commitment and fidelity. Emotional pain is thus inevitable, as in such patterns people are reduced to objects of pleasure.

Vasopressin is the male neurochemical counterpart of oxytocin and is called the “monogamy molecule” for males. Males bond with females and with their offspring because of this chemical in the male brain.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Peter L. Benson, et al., “Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,” Commission on Children at Risk. Institute for American Values, (2003); published report.

<sup>41</sup> McIlhaney, 36.

<sup>42</sup> McIlhaney, 39.

<sup>43</sup> McIlhaney, 41.

<sup>44</sup> McIlhaney, 41.

The ramifications of these value-neutral chemicals are evident among sexually active and promiscuous emerging adults. When a student engages in risk taking sexual activity with multiple partners, the need for increased levels of dopamine becomes paramount. Increased levels of dopamine lead to continued risky and negatively consequential behavior. The influence of dopamine makes it harder and harder to say “no.”<sup>45</sup>

The temporary pleasure of a repetitive physical sexual activity actually changes the way our brains function and make decisions. Females engaging in active sexual experimentation are three times more likely to attempt suicide than peers who are virgins. Similarly, males are seven times more likely to attempt suicide than male peers who remain celibate before marriage.<sup>46</sup> The very neurochemicals that are designed to foster a deep sense of trust and bonding between a husband and a wife and between parents and their children are contributors to alienation and distrust among sex partners outside monogamous relationships. When sexual promiscuity begins in adolescence, the brain is poorly programmed by premature and unwise sexual behavior that causes brain formation for healthy decision making to be damaged.<sup>47</sup> From a Christian perspective, the human body is neurologically designed to have exhilarating sex, building a trust formation in the context of a covenant of marriage. Unfortunately, the improper use of our bodies in an alternative context leads to a “greed” for more that leaves one alienated, hurt, distrusting and underdeveloped. “Put to death therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”<sup>48</sup> The human

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<sup>45</sup> McIlhaney, 39.

<sup>46</sup> McIlhaney, 20.

<sup>47</sup> McIlhaney, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Colossians 3:5.

body if fed a steady diet will in fact become dependent upon that diet to sustain a level of sensitivity and pleasure. The central challenge of emerging adult life, learning to stand on one's own two feet, becomes sidetracked if not derailed by problems associated with the addictions.<sup>49</sup> A dopamine driven life fosters an inability to bond after multiple sex encounters that is like tape that loses its stickiness after being applied and removed multiple times.<sup>50</sup>

Obviously, the effects of early exposure to pornography do not suddenly go away in a statistical majority of emerging adults. Availability of pornography is a constant in this culture. Pornography can and does become a mental and physical preoccupation that affects one's self-esteem, one's relationships and one's future.

### **Pornography and Its Prevalence**

The tension that exists between the body and soul is evident as one considers current research on the prevalent use of pornography. Early exposure to pornography meets a need for pleasure and escape during emerging adulthood and beyond but has lasting consequences for the soul.

Dr. Patrick Carnes, a leading authority in the area of sexual addiction, developed the Sexual Addiction Screening Test (SAST).<sup>51</sup> This 33-question test was administered online to 28,125 students representing 1,110 colleges from 2006 through 2008.<sup>52</sup> As one might think, the availability of pornography is high through all modes of technological communication. Results of the SAST indicate that for all intents and purposes, 100% of

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<sup>49</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, 65.

<sup>50</sup> McIlhaney, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Carnes, "Sexual Addiction Recovery Test," November 16, 2008, accessed September 9, 2013, <http://www.recoveryzone.com/index.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Leahy, *Porn University* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2009), 39.



those surveyed had been exposed to pornography on some level and at some point in life. One question on the survey addresses the age of one's first exposure to pornography. The majority of boys (69%) first view pornography between the ages of 10 and 14. Sixty-eight percent of girls first see it when they are 13 or older.<sup>53</sup> Eight of ten boys first see pornography of some kind before the eighth grade, compared to 52% of girls.<sup>54</sup> These statistics may support the idea that pubescent boys often use pornography as a means of sexual education.<sup>55</sup>

As the above statistics show, the exposure to pornography starts early in many people's lives. The continued use of it among emerging adults is also a reality. Fifty-one percent of college males acknowledge spending up to 5 hours per week exposed to pornographic, sexually explicit material, compared to a much lower 16% of all college women surveyed. An additional figure is alarming: eleven percent of college males surveyed spend 5-20 hours per week pursuing "sex on the web." An additional 2% acknowledge spending over 20 hours per week in the same activity.<sup>56</sup>

Other than the obvious time investment, there appear to be significant measurable consequences from ongoing pornographic exposure. These consequences are easily experienced in the area of a student's perception of self and his or her relationships with others, as well as a potential for physiological addiction in the form of a sexual syndrome or an actual sexual addiction.

The cycle of the use of pornography is fairly clear in terms of analyzing the impact it has on one's self esteem. Those who engage pornography as a means of

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<sup>53</sup> Leahy, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Leahy, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Leahy, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Leahy, 59.

providing self-pleasure and or escape from the stresses of life seem to have something in common. The cycle of shame and guilt associated with masturbation provides a temporary escape yet it also leads to the very shame and guilt that must be avoided yet again. This cycle can continue even with repeated attempts to break the pattern.<sup>57</sup> This internal struggle can and does cause depression among many students, as indicated by their anecdotal expressions of frustration.<sup>58</sup>

Pornography also negatively affects one's relationships. Quite a large percentage of students describe their sexual behavior as hurtful to others. Forty-five percent of males and 42 percent of females acknowledge hurting those with whom they are in relationship because of their sexual indiscretions in the use of pornography.<sup>59</sup> Scholars describe postmodern college students as being "moral relativists." Tolerance of others and the absence of judging others carry a big premium in this particular culture. It is interesting that in the area of sexual exploration and experimentation there appears to be an "eventual taboo" associated with masturbation and pornographic exposure that causes a moral problem with students that is not consistent with the relativistic mentality of this subculture. Though a morally relativistic culture, sexual behavior that hurts others appears to be more often wrong than right. Interpersonal relationships are effected on many levels, certainly when it comes to the objectification of women. Pornographic images ask nothing of a viewer. Images do not feel pain or challenge one to grow in any way. In real life, this is not the case. Perhaps exposure to pornography lulls one into a state of desensitization on not only an emotional level but a physiological level as well.

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<sup>57</sup> Leahy, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Leahy, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Leahy, 85.

In fact, 23% of all college students are at risk for digressing into a sexual syndrome whereby sexual pleasure and intimacy decrease and the need for exposure to intense sexual stimuli like cyber porn increases.<sup>60</sup>

Studies show that there is a direct correlation between ongoing exposure to pornography and erectile dysfunction. A heavy porn user is not unlike an addict or alcoholic that can no longer get high with small doses of a “drug.” The heightened tolerance to porn use necessitates the need to introduce new, harder themes and fetishes to cause arousal. This tolerance carries over into real relationships where erectile dysfunction is experienced. A male brain that is over stimulated by pornography can produce neurological changes, specifically a decreased sensitivity to the neurotransmitter dopamine that can desensitize a person to actual sexual encounters with a partner. The Italian Society of Andrology and Sexual Medicine, the largest urology organization in Italy, surveyed 28,000 men and concluded that repeated exposure to pornography over a long period of time can cause the “gradual but devastating” effects of porn-induced erectile dysfunction.<sup>61</sup>

The back pages of Internet porn sites are filled with ads for Viagra-type drugs, yet porn-induced erectile dysfunction is not physiological but psychological.<sup>62</sup> The good news is that young men can overcome this dysfunction through abstaining from porn use and masturbation for two to six weeks when one’s libido and brain homeostasis can and often does return to normal after typically experiencing symptoms inclusive of withdrawal, agitation, sleeplessness and depression.

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<sup>60</sup> Leahy, 99.

<sup>61</sup> Carlo Foresta, “Too Much Internet Porn May Cause Impotence,” February 25, 2011, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.yourbrainonporn.com/book/export/html/363>.

<sup>62</sup> Foresta.

## **Homosexuality and Its Acceptability Among College Students**

The current culture is becoming more accepting of homosexuality; thus, homosexuals and bisexuals are becoming more transparent about their sexual preferences. The acceptability of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle is on the rise. In 2002, a Gallup poll reported that 52% of those polled accepted homosexuality as acceptable, whereas a similar poll twenty years earlier noted acceptance at only 34%. Among those ages 18 to 29, 62% were accepting of homosexual behavior.<sup>63</sup> The United States Supreme Court regards the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional according to the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution. The Federal Government must recognize same-sex marriages as they do homosexual marriages.<sup>64</sup>

While the culture is becoming more accepting of homosexuality and subsequent “marriages” or civil unions, one may wonder what the underlying reason is for growing acceptance. The age-old “nature vs. nurture” debate regarding the reason for a homosexual preference seems to mean little to current college students. Students today are accepting of the behavior and are less interested in the casual effects of homosexuality itself. Scientific conclusions regarding the reason why some are gay seem to matter little. What does matter to college students is that some prefer the same sex and others do not. The growing trend is to accept either perspective.

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<sup>63</sup> Darren K. Carlson, “Acceptance of Homosexuality: A Youth Movement,” February 19, 2002, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5341/acceptance-homosexuality-youth-movement.aspx?version=print>.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan J. Reilly and Sabrina Siddiqui, “Supreme Court DOMA Decision Rules Federal Same-Sex Marriage Ban Unconstitutional,” June 26, 2013, accessed March 7, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/26/supreme-court-doma-decision\\_n\\_3454811.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/26/supreme-court-doma-decision_n_3454811.html).

## **Prevalence of Homosexual Behavior Among College Students**

While the prevalence of homosexual behavior tends to remain constant in culture, college students tend to experiment more in homosexual behavior. The rate of active homosexual behavior is substantially higher among those twenty-nine years old and younger, in comparison to those in other seasons of life. As people age, the rate of a person's acknowledgment of their homosexuality decreases. People ages 65 and older only claim to be homosexual 1.9% of the time. Those in the 50-64 year age range see themselves as homosexual only 2.6% of the time. Those between 30 and 49 years acknowledge themselves as homosexual at 3.2%. A large increase occurs between ages 18 and 29.<sup>65</sup> This downward trend in seems to indicate that homosexuality is a choice more so than a constant genetic disposition throughout life.

Unlike other age categories, females tend to experiment in homosexual behavior more frequent than males. In the 18 to 29 age range, 8.3% of women, while only 4.6% of men, identify with being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).<sup>66</sup> Other studies have shown that as many as 14% of late female teens and twenties have had at least one same-sex experience as opposed to only 6% of males the same age.<sup>67</sup> Some experts who study sexuality conclude that college students see experimentation as a rite of passage in their development.<sup>68</sup> Though men who have same sex encounters are less likely to talk about them, women in their twenties tend to see such experiences as a "badge of

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<sup>65</sup> Carlson.

<sup>66</sup> Carlson.

<sup>67</sup> USA Today, "Survey Finds More Women Experiment with Bisexuality," Associated Press, September 15, 2005, accessed March 7, 2015, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-09-15-womenbisexuality\\_x.htm#](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-09-15-womenbisexuality_x.htm#).

<sup>68</sup> USA Today.

courage.”<sup>69</sup> This prevalence has been label by some experts as “L.U.G.” or lesbian until graduation.<sup>70</sup>

### **Psychological and Emotional Effects of Homosexual Behavior**

The synergistic effect of cultural acceptance and the increased prevalence of homosexuality among college students are not without psychological and emotional consequences.

Gay or bisexual men evidence a higher prevalence of depression, panic attacks and psychological distress than heterosexual men.<sup>71</sup> While a case can be made that additional stressors are evident in a gay males’ lives because of a social stigma, in fact homosexual behavior is becoming more and more acceptable, as statistics for depression and emotional challenges remain constant. Lesbian or bisexual women showed greater prevalence of generalized anxiety disorders than heterosexual women.<sup>72</sup> In the diagnostic category of major depression, gay or bisexual women showed a prevalence rate of 33.5% in contrast to heterosexual women at a rate of 16.8%.<sup>73</sup> In the categories of generalized anxiety disorders, panic disorders, alcohol dependency, gay or bisexual women showed a prevalence rate two if not three times higher than heterosexual women surveyed.<sup>74</sup>

There is an inherent power to sexuality that either greatly enhances one’s life or hinders if not destroys the quality of one’s life. The lack of moral sexual boundaries of 18-24 year old college students obviously yields a vast array of negative physical,

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<sup>69</sup> USA Today.

<sup>70</sup> USA Today.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Cochran, J. Greg Sullivan, Vickie M. Mays, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* Vol. 71, No 1, (2003): 53-61.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Cochran, J. Greg Sullivan, Vickie M. Mays.

<sup>73</sup> Cochran, 53-61.

<sup>74</sup> Cochran, 53-61.

psychological and spiritual consequences. College students engaged in sexual polyamory are certainly looking for pleasure, identity, worth and meaning in life. This quest is leaving students empty and longing for something beyond social acceptance and human flesh. The lasting emotional ramifications of sexual behavior or the shame associated with unwanted pregnancies and/or abortions rivals the physical effects of sexually transmitted diseases. The dysfunctional and addictive qualities of pornography have consequences that effect present and future relationships. The human physiological make-up, created to enjoy the incredible power of monogamous sex in the context of a covenant of marriage is leaving young men in women in a cycle of experiencing chemical washes that leave them uncontrollably seeking all they desire in the wrong places. The sexually promiscuous college student is in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ that can lead them to find meaning, purpose, identity and purity, enabling them to enjoy the power of sex as biblically celebrated. A thorough discovery of a biblical framework from which the gospel can be communicated is but a first step toward that highly liberating and desirable end. There is a substantial difference between the sexual behavior of students that are categorized as “devoted” in their faith and those who are not.<sup>75</sup>

A thorough analysis of the practice and consequences of collegiate sexual behavior certainly reveals a need for a positive, authentic transformational change. The physical, social, psychological and spiritual ramifications of the aforementioned sexual practices of many college students are evident. The needed change is best brought about through the hearing, believing and receiving of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Using key biblical passages and a basic grasp of postmodernism, this study will serve as a means for

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<sup>75</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 272-273.

constructing an effective method of evangelism for reaching today's sexually active emerging adults.

The purpose of this thesis-project is to devise and implement a theologically based strategy for the evangelization of today's sexually active college student, which takes into consideration the postmodern values that drive this generation, but also leads them into biblical truth that frees them from sexual immorality and frees them for sexual purity.

Two key New Testament passages provide a good biblical basis for constructing such an effective evangelistic strategy. The Apostle Paul utilized a strategy to reach academics with the gospel on the Areopagus in Athens. Additional parallels exist between collegiates today and the sexual immorality among some people in the first century city of Corinth. Paul's words to the intelligentsia in Athens and his response to the crisis of sexual immorality in Corinth lay an appropriate biblical framework for the development of an effective evangelistic strategy. Beyond these two key passages, an exploration of the theology of the Trinity will also provide a framework for devising an effective means of evangelism. It is through these biblical lenses and through a brief analysis of postmodernism that this work will build a biblical framework for reaching sexually promiscuous college students with the gospel. The first step toward such a strategy lies in understanding the conflict between the church and society regarding human sexual behavior.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

A thorough analysis of the practices and consequences of collegiate sexual behavior certainly reveals a need for positive, authentic change. Three key New Testament passages provide a good basis for constructing an effective evangelistic strategy. The Apostle Paul utilized a strategy to impact academics with the gospel on the Areopagus in Athens. There are additional parallels between college students today and the sexual immorality some people in the first century city of Corinth practiced. Paul's words to the intelligentsia in Athens and Paul's response to a crisis of immorality in Corinth provide a sound biblical framework for the development of an effective evangelistic strategy. Additionally, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son accentuates key factors for realizing effective evangelism within any cultural context. It is through these biblical lenses and through an analysis of postmodernism and a theology of community that this work will discover a biblical framework for reaching college students. However, the first step toward developing such a strategy lies in understanding the conflict that exists between the church and society regarding human sexual behavior.

#### **The Conflict Between the Church and Society Regarding Human Sexual Behavior**

##### **Biblical Perspective of Human Sexuality**

The biblical church properly sees human sexuality in a very bright light. It is not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea of an accurate biblical perspective of sexuality. God, out of his omniscience, conceived of human sexuality and made provision for it. Therefore, a greater understanding of God's

original perspective could only help to redefine a now distorted human perspective on sexuality. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in a biblical reality, sexuality originates in God, and he intended it to be fantastic and purposeful in the right context.

Obviously, creation without procreation prohibits the survival of humankind. Through God's sovereignty, he created unique D.N.A. and genetic codes for both male and female that they might multiply and sustain life. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Creator of all things is obviously pro sex, for all he created is good, yet one thing concerning his creation was not good, namely that man was alone.<sup>3</sup> As a solution God created woman. The Creator created man and woman in his image; thus, they are capable of relationship on multiple levels.<sup>4</sup> The first man and woman were created with distinct anatomical features and the hormonal, chemical make-up to have and enjoy sex on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. God is very mindful of the incredible potency of sex and the bond, the pleasure and even excitement it is meant to provide for those he created. Man and woman were created to enjoy God, enjoy his creation and to enjoy one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca O'Neill, "Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family." *Civitas*, September 2002, 2-20.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-28.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:26.

God created Adam and Eve without any shame regarding any aspect of their bodies. They were beautiful and without any perceived deficiency or vanity. This is how God created and intended men and women to be, both with each other and in his presence. “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”<sup>5</sup> God intended for nakedness to be enjoyed in his presence. Originally, when Adam and Eve were naked in the garden, their consciousness was enamored with God, as opposed to being highly limited, restrictive and self-focused. There was no reason for humanity to be embarrassed or ashamed, for embarrassment and shame did not exist in a world that was void of the destructive power of sin.

The importance of human sexual identity becomes highly diluted and polluted after the fall of man. When the covenantal protectiveness of God is violated, God, being just, allows human relationships to be reconstituted according to our fallen desires. Since the Fall, humans have been able to experience sexuality on a selfish level. Man in essence becomes his own God, who incorporates his own distorted reality into his sexuality. Adam and Eve saw one another differently after the Fall. Through clouded vision, they saw their nakedness and associated it with shame. Hiding from God and one another became a perceived necessity. The same things remain true for humanity today. The divine, unconditional agape love that is rooted and centered in the Creator has become distorted and now is something unnatural to both men and women. The first love that humanity experienced differs from the “love” we began to experience after the Fall. Sexuality has been sequestered to a new, distorted context. After the fall of man, the incredible potency of human sexuality, if not experienced in the proper divinely ordained context, can and does create physical, emotional, and spiritual destruction, as is evident in

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:25.

the collegiate culture today. Society now has at its disposal and potent “kryptonite,” ironically conceived by God yet destructive apart from God’s redemptive intrusion. Human sexuality must be expressed within a proper context, just as hazardous waste must be left in an appropriate place; if either is left unchecked, hazardous conditions will ensue on both a personal and a cultural level.

In the infinite wisdom of God, sexuality is to be experienced in the context of a monogamous relationship called marriage. Men and women were physically created to become one flesh in a covenant of marriage. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”<sup>6</sup> The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.<sup>7</sup> It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.<sup>8</sup> Sex outside the context of a covenant has potentially extreme consequences, as one can see among postmodern college students, as well as in every other culture throughout the ages.

God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.<sup>9</sup> It is similar to the difference between the wild energy of lightning and the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what he was doing when he limited sex to the bounds of marriage!<sup>10</sup> Sex is so special that God devised a forum in which humanity can experience it at its highest potential. God is certainly pro sex, pro pleasure, pro intimacy and pro communication for both men and women, in the context he

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:24.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 13:4.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18.

<sup>10</sup> O’Neill, 2-20.

prescribes. Sexuality in the context of marriage is to be an alluring, beautifully intimate experience, as depicted in the Song of Songs.

Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.”<sup>11</sup>

God also says that an important purpose of marriage is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mysterious yet real spiritual union of Christ and his bride, the church, where two very different, very *other* beings are joined together as one. Marriage is the context in which men learn from Christ how to truly love a woman, rather than simply lust after her. Marriage is the union where spirituality is experienced between a husband and a wife and Christ himself.<sup>12</sup> This spiritual component to marriage as a proper sexual context is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.<sup>13</sup> The biblical perspective on human sexual behavior does not differentiate the physical and the spiritual. One's physicality is integrated into one's spirituality. The Apostle Paul's prayer for the Christian believers in Thessalonica highlights this integration of the whole person. “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Christ followers are to love the Lord with all of their hearts, soul mind and strength.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Song of Songs 2:8-13.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 5:25-33.

<sup>13</sup> O'Neill, 2-20.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 22:37.

Biblically speaking, it is impossible to alienate or sequester the use of one's body from the rest of the person.

God is monogamous in relationship with his people. In fact, God describes himself as jealous.<sup>16</sup> God has a love concern when those he loves pursue idols that cannot feel, love, live or die for those who worship them. The Heavenly Father, as any good father would do, provides boundaries for safety, wholeness, innocence and pleasure to be experienced. The genesis of one's sexual identity originates in God, not in one's peers.

The chasm that exists between the biblical perspective and society's perspective is vast. This polarity explains the reality of the consequences experienced among sexually promiscuous college students today. The biblical perspective concerning human sexual behavior can be summarized in the following way: sexuality is God originated and ordained and is to be enjoyed in the context of a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. Sexuality is a means of expressing and confirming a mutual love and respect that is blessed or affirmed by God himself in the safety and intimacy of that covenant. Conversely, secular sexuality goes without the blessing of God for such behavior is in direct opposition to the divine boundaries prescribed for sexual intimacy. Therefore, sinful sexuality naturally yields negative consequences on either spiritual, physical or emotions levels.

#### Societal Perspective on Human Sexual Behavior

Society's alternate, conflicting perspective and agenda regarding human sexual behavior reaches most people's ears well before adulthood, pervades all aspects of culture and remains a consistent message throughout one's lifespan. Society's message concerning sexuality is delivered in great part through the power of marketing, media and

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<sup>16</sup> Exodus 20:4.

the arts. This message is introduced to people at a very young age. In a survey of 2,100 eleven to seventeen year old girls, only the eleven year olds reported that they did not feel pressure from the media to begin having sex.<sup>17</sup> The sexual behavior of college students does not suddenly begin during one's freshman year on campus. The seed of society's sexual ideology is planted far earlier in a child's life. A national survey of 1,300 teens revealed that 20% reported having sent or posted nude pictures or videos of themselves ("sexting").<sup>18</sup> Biblical sexuality provides the best place to enjoy sex, namely in the context of marriage and in adulthood. Society drives home a different message yielding negative results among sexually active college students today. Advertisements today depict women likely to be shown in sexually suggestive clothing 30% of the time, partially clad 13% of the time and nude 6% of the time.<sup>19</sup> Society's ideology conflicts with the biblical message by making sexual intimacy and one's exposed body public, as opposed to recognizing them as parts of an intimate exchange between two committed adults in covenant. The belief and practice that "sex sells" certainly pervades every aspect of culture and targets nearly every age group, including the very young, thus solidifying a perspective on human sexuality that is well rooted and established in the mindset of students by the time they get to college.

Postmodern society has abandoned the very consideration of the biblical perspective by dismissing the Word of God as both inspired and authoritative as well as

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<sup>17</sup> P. Haag, "Voices of a Generation: Teenage Girls on Sex, School, and Self." American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, September 2010, accessed December 9, 2015. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/3/576.full.pdf+html?sid=9ef598fc-5956-4712-9434-9ed1b2f32795>.

<sup>18</sup> "National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy," Pediatrics, September, 2008, accessed September 28, 2010, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/3/576.full.pdf+html?sid=9ef598fc-5956-4712-9434-9ed1b2f32795>.

<sup>19</sup> T. Reichert, C. Carpenter, "An Update on Sex in Magazine Advertising," September 8, 2014, accessed September 19, 2014, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/3/576.full.pdf+html?sid=9ef598fc-5956-4712-9434-9ed1b2f32795>.

discounting the authenticity of the church that communicates that very message. Culture has embraced the highly conditioned response of seeing sexual behavior as self-directed self-expression far beyond any protective biblical boundaries that God has staked out in a spirit of love and protectiveness. The postmodern culture has a pervasive spiritual “fatherlessness” that has caused a gross deviation from the joyous model of sex that the Father originally intended. Marriage, fidelity and intimacy have all been distorted. Crossing the lines of holy sexual boundaries that bring joy to the heart of the Father has riddled the sexually charged culture with confusion, shame and disease and has alienated people from God and one another.

Many college students have been long provided with an alternative model of sexual identity apart from a heavenly Father. Whether caught or taught, culture has discounted biblical sexuality and redefined marriage. The loving, relational model devised in the mind of God is not the model society adopts as relevant. A loving relationship by definition necessitates choice. In relationship to God and his Word, society has made a choice concerning sexuality. God is still allowing that freedom of choice to be exercised because God is relational. Scripturally speaking, “God is giving men and women over to their sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”<sup>20</sup>

The conflict regarding sexual behavior between the biblical church and society is vast. A potentially different yet very effective strategy is needed to evangelize this consistently conditioned, sexually charged society. This reality in the twenty-first century is not that much of a deviation from the reality of the first century. The culture and spiritual temperature of first century Athens and Corinth provide interesting parallels to

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 1:24.



today's misuse and misunderstanding of spirituality and sexuality. The church is in need of an effective, biblically-based strategy to evangelize unabashedly sexually active college students in the twenty-first century.

### **The Prelude to the Apostle Paul's Speech at the Areopagus**

An analysis of the Apostle Paul's approach to sharing the gospel with the intelligentsia in first century Athens is, in part, a means of forming an evangelistic strategy to reaching college students in the twenty-first century. In Acts 17, prior to reaching Athens, Paul preaches in Thessalonica where he sees fruit,<sup>21</sup> yet he encounters a hostile opposition that precipitates his flight to Berea.<sup>22</sup> The angry mob gives chase, and Paul eludes trouble by making his way alone to Athens.

There in Athens, Paul finds himself alone, awaiting the eventual arrival of Silas and Timothy, who do not reunite with Paul until his subsequent trip to Corinth.<sup>23</sup> Paul observes the city of Athens and its spiritual climate, which is anything but monotheistic. Paul's is challenged with presenting a monotheistic gospel to a sophisticated, polytheistic audience. The Apostle Paul's speech to the Areopagus in Athens is a critical episode in Acts because it represents one of the few places in Luke's account where a purely pagan audience is confronted with the gospel.<sup>24</sup> What can be gleaned from Paul's speech, and how would one measure his success in penetrating the culture with the gospel? A careful analysis of Greek Athenian culture and its worldview in light of Paul's gospel presentation may in part reveal an effective means of communicating the gospel to the

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 17:4.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 17:9.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 18:5.

<sup>24</sup> Ballast, David. 2003. "Contextualizing the Gospel: Comparing Paul's Methods in Athens and Corinth." Master's Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

postmodern culture today. Paul's speech is either a defense of the Christian faith and or a challenge to Pagan religion.<sup>25</sup> An exegetical analysis of Paul's speech may shed light on whether he was actually seeking common philosophical ground between him and his listeners or simply introducing a new strategy to penetrate the culture with the Christian message of salvation.<sup>26</sup>

### **An Exegetical Treatment of Acts 17:16-34**

#### **Acts 17:16-17**

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there."<sup>27</sup> Athens, during Paul's day, was the intellectual center of the world, where Greek philosophy reigned supreme and art, literature, philosophy, learning, and oratorical skills were present and influential far beyond the region.<sup>28</sup>

Now Paul, in this highly creative and intellectual setting, was "greatly distressed." What he met in Athens was a forest of idols.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he was more than *greatly distressed*; he experienced a paroxysm in his spirit. Any paraphernalia of false worship should provoke in us, as it did Paul, such grieving anger that we, jealous for the glory of God and his Christ, reach out and share the good news, which includes a call to

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<sup>25</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 640.

<sup>26</sup> Kistemaker, 640.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 17:16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Kistemaker, 624, 625.

<sup>29</sup> R.E. Wycherley, "St. Paul at Athens," *Journal of Theological Studies*, October, 1968, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Witness-Athens?action=getBookSections&cid=5&source=1>.

repentance.<sup>30</sup> The burden of one called for those in spiritual distress and error is a necessity for preaching the gospel, for truth shared in Christ or in love can and will bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Paul observed many idols in Athens, but in facing this challenge, he was able to draw upon the experience he acquired while dealing with similar issues in Thessalonica.<sup>31</sup> It was Paul's custom to share the good news of the risen Christ among the Jews first when arriving in any geographic area; then after that, he would move outward into the marketplace.<sup>32</sup> Once beyond the synagogue, Paul moved among the people in the marketplace (agora), a place of commerce, social interaction, worship and governing.<sup>33</sup> As an apostle sent to proclaim the gospel, by necessity, Paul had to remain among the people.

Because of the attention Paul received in the streets, it was inevitable that he would soon get to speak directly to those in authority, who would require a highly intelligible and direct explanation of Paul's new teaching.<sup>34</sup> It appears to be inevitable that Paul's message would have attracted the attention of those in the marketplace who felt the responsibility to inquire on behalf of the city regarding both his message and his agenda.

#### Acts 17:18a

"A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be

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<sup>30</sup> John R.W. Stott, ed., *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 279.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Thess. 1:9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 17:2-3.

<sup>33</sup> "Ancient Corinth: Agora," Ancient Corinth, June 10, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.ancient-corinth.com/agora.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Kistemaker, 625.

advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”<sup>35</sup>

The Epicureans were followers of Epicurus (342-270 B.C.), who taught that death was not to be feared, that even the soul comes to an end and that the body dies.<sup>36</sup> In Corinth, Paul immediately found himself communicating with a biblically illiterate group of men, already entrenched in an ideology in direct opposition to Paul’s beliefs. Epicureans were atomic materialists that viewed reality as an endless chance combining and dispersing of atoms. They would find the concept of bodily resurrection laughable.<sup>37</sup> Epicureans viewed pleasure as the primary purpose of human existence, though they emphasized the pleasures of the mind over sensual pleasure.<sup>38</sup> Their purpose in life was to avoid suffering and grief and to pursue satisfaction and happiness.<sup>39</sup> Although appetizing, in the reality of a fallen world, this mindset appears to not be without faults. Unlike believers in the gospel of the kingdom, the Epicureans believed that there is no afterlife in the presence of a god and that during a person’s life on earth, the gods maintained a distance, “being far removed from the lives of human beings and taking no real interest in them.”<sup>40</sup>

As if one opposing theology were not sufficient, Paul found himself also entering a debate with Stoic philosophers as well. Stoics believed that man attains his highest aspiration when he subjects himself to the course of events totally controlled by the

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 17:18.

<sup>36</sup> Kistemaker, 626.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Henry, “Commentary: Acts 17:16-21,” Bible Gateway, June 10, 2012, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Acts.17.16-Acts.17.21>.

<sup>38</sup> Ballast, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Kistemaker, 626.

<sup>40</sup> Ballast, 14.

divine, which is defined as a state of happiness.<sup>41</sup> Stoics lived in relationship to happenstance rather than in relationship with a personal deity capable of knowing as well as being known. There was no meaning, action or belief within a Stoic's experience on earth that would in any way have a bearing on an afterlife. For the Stoic, there is no afterlife and certainly no judgment. The Stoics, materialist pantheists, identified the divine as the principle of reason pervading all and, in the form of fate, governing all. Because of either their cyclic eschatology (belief that there were periodic conflagrations of the universe after which history simply repeated itself) or their later adoption of the Platonic concept of the soul's immortality, they could not conceive of resurrection.<sup>42</sup>

Unique to Stoics was a different perspective on the human soul. Unlike Epicureans, Stoics believed in the survival of the soul after death but by no means in an unlimited or immortal context.<sup>43</sup> No Stoic by definition believed in a resurrection for the dead, let alone a bodily resurrection.<sup>44</sup> The concept of judgment of the soul did not exist in the Stoic mindset.<sup>45</sup>

In his distress, Paul was faced with the challenge of speaking while maintaining credible consideration from this influential audience whom God had given him. With that challenge in mind, Paul needed to exercise restraint in the face of ridicule or slander, as the apostle Peter admonished others to do. "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear

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<sup>41</sup> Kistemaker, 626.

<sup>42</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, "Biblical Ethics: The Functions of God's Law," November 1980, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://reformed-theology.org/ice/newslet/be/be.11.80.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Ballast, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ballast, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ballast, 15.

conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to Paul’s preparation for ministry via revelation from God, he was also prepared through secular means. Paul would have felt at home in such an academic arena as Athens, for he was born in Tarsus, reared and educated in Jerusalem and after his conversion spent many years back in Tarsus, where Stoic philosophy was taught at the University of Tarsus.<sup>47</sup>

The Epicureans’ and Stoics’ responses to Paul’s message were predictably coarse. Their description of Paul as a “babbler” was an expected response from a people that placed a very high premium on oratory. The word “babbler” is translated from the Greek word *spermologos*, meaning “seed picker,” intimating that Paul plagiarized others only for attention.<sup>48</sup> Paul was being scrutinized for his delivery and his content, which was certainly a doubly difficult challenge. When reading Luke’s account of Paul’s speech at Areopagus, one cannot immediately empathize with Paul’s emotions, yet some conclude that Paul’s opening comments to the church in Corinth regarding his visit subsequent to his time in Athens is an indication of Paul’s sentiments on the Athenian reactions. To the church in Corinth, he adamantly deemphasized an oral delivery of “eloquence” rooted in “human wisdom” but conversely accentuated the content of a message and the use of a testimony given in weakness, with “great fear and trembling,” as a “demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike the rhetorical Sophists in Athens, Paul understood the reality

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<sup>46</sup> 1 Peter 3:15-16.

<sup>47</sup> Kistemaker, 625.

<sup>48</sup> Kistemaker, 627.

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

“that Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”<sup>50</sup>

Acts 17:18b

“ ‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”<sup>51</sup>

The very mention of resurrection would likely have prompted the Athenians to think that Paul was proclaiming a doctrine about two deities: firstly, this one named Jesus, of whom they were not accustomed to hearing, and secondly, ‘Anastasis,’ which in Greek means “resurrection.”<sup>52</sup> The scrutiny placed upon Paul in the agora (marketplace) was enough to conclude that the matters he discussed in the streets were worthy of further scrutiny upon the Areopagus, where the gatekeepers of new doctrine awaited him. Despite some listeners’ negative comments, Paul was regarded as credible in that he was addressing matters important to the academic scene in Athens at the time; he was addressing issues such as morality, death, judgment and resurrection.<sup>53</sup>

Acts 17:19-21

“Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.’ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

<sup>51</sup> Acts 17:18.

<sup>52</sup> Kistemaker, 627.

<sup>53</sup> Kistemaker, 627.

<sup>54</sup> Acts 17:19-21.

The learned philosophers at the Areopagus acted as gatekeepers for the adoption of new teachings of a spiritual nature.<sup>55</sup> Winter, in his book entitled *On Introducing Gods*, quotes the work of Garland, who states that in order for a new religion to be accepted in Athens, three things had to be demonstrated by its sponsor to the Areopagus: “(1) the herald was the deity’s representative, (2) the god was eager to set up residence in Athens, (3) some benefit had already accrued to the Athenians which could be construed as proof or a sign of goodwill.”<sup>56</sup> Apparently mindful of these criteria, Paul spoke to these philosophers as a herald of the risen Christ about Christ’s desire to be near to them, in that the risen Lord Christ made promises of their future resurrection.

Despite the uniqueness of the teaching, Paul was afforded his opportunity to speak to the Epicureans and Stoics; there was still a desire to hear this new teaching. The Areopagus, Athens’s chief legislative and judicial council, licensed traveling lecturers, and Paul’s hearers wanted to see whether he should be given freedom to continue to teach. They wanted to understand this new teaching, for some strange (rather, “surprising, astounding”) ideas were coming to their ears. Typically, the Athenians had an ambivalent relation to “foreign gods.” On the one hand, they were famous for incorporating alien deities into their pantheon.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, they believed they must stay vigilant lest “new gods” undermine the morals of the state.<sup>58</sup> Apparently, something in Paul’s demeanor or in the content of his message warranted their further scrutiny.

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<sup>55</sup> Ballast, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Ballast, 12.

<sup>57</sup> H.C. Hamilton, “The Geography of Strabo,” January 3, 2010, accessed March 30, 2014, <http://www.piney.com/Strabo.Geography.10A.html>.

<sup>58</sup> “Commentary Acts 17”, August 12, 2013, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://godswordonline.net/acts17.htm>.



## Acts 17:22

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.’”<sup>59</sup>

Though Paul was not actually speaking to the entire city, he was in fact speaking to those who represented the city. As a herald of Christ, Paul was identifying with the requirement of the council that he be a representative of a deity. The authority to represent God that Paul claimed was not unlike the representative authority that those on the Areopagus had for their city and their gods.

The Athenians’ reputation for religious piety has been well attested.<sup>60</sup> The Greek word for “religious” (*hos desidaimonesterous*) can be understood in a positive sense (devout) or in a negative sense, as with a superstitious connotation. Paul put the ambiguity to good use. In light of verses 23 and 30, he probably wanted to say “they have a religion . . . but it is wrongheaded.” In these verses, we have Paul’s respectful recognition of people’s religious endeavors but not an acknowledgment that they lead to true, saving faith. Paul was telling a simple but limited truth and creating a basis for further comment.<sup>61</sup> Having at least established a point of contact with the Athenians, albeit vague, Paul sought to uncover the Athenians’ true need, to have knowledge of the one true God. This ingenious example of “missional contextualization” provided him further opportunity to speak to and connect with his listeners.

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<sup>59</sup> Acts 17:22.

<sup>60</sup> W.H.S. Jones, “Description of Greece,” Theoi E-Texts Library, January 2010, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1B.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Ballast, 17.

### Acts 17:23

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”<sup>62</sup>

It is wise to not only know one’s audience but to also know the audience’s motivation for listening. Paul saw an obvious contradiction regarding his learned, scholastic audience. As learned as they claimed to be, they were without knowledge of one of the gods they actually worshiped. The crowd at the Areopagus not only worshipped in ignorance, but they notified the entire city of their ignorance via a permanent inscription. This obvious open door provided Paul with an opportunity to both understand the mindset of the culture and to notify them of their apparent contradiction. It is tough to argue with one’s own signage. Paul now made his point of contact, saying that *what [they] worship as something unknown* (literally, “what they worship being ignorant”) he would *proclaim* to them. He was introducing no new god; Christ’s identity was simply being unveiled to those who would admit, if only unconsciously, their ignorance. At the very least, Paul was stressing the ignorance with which they were worshipping. This again was only a limited point of contact; it simply served as a way to raise the basic question, “Who is God?”<sup>63</sup>

### Acts 17:24-26

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human

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<sup>62</sup> Acts 17:23.

<sup>63</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Witness at Athens,” InterVarsity Press, June 12, 2014, accessed April 7, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Witness-Athens?action=getBookSections&cid=5&source=1>.

hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”<sup>64</sup>

The Apostle Paul could not assume that his audience had any biblical knowledge. He began his teaching, centering on the doctrine of God and creation, followed by the doctrine of man, concluding with the doctrine of the judgment and the resurrection.<sup>65</sup>

Paul challenged Stoic pantheism and Epicurean materialistic deism by testifying that the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>66</sup> The very creation that the Athenians enjoyed and even worshipped could not hold a god in a temple. The expansiveness of the universe, Paul explained, is the result of a divine work of the Lord of both heaven and earth. The implication for worship is that God *does not live in temples built by hands*.<sup>67</sup> Paul’s God has need of nothing, for he is self-existing and self-sufficient by name. He is the “I Am.”<sup>68</sup> (Interestingly, this was a tenet of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism; Plutarch took subsequent generations to task for abandoning it in practice). In chiasmic fashion, Paul moved immediately to another implication: God is *not served by human hands, as if he needed anything*.<sup>69</sup> An idol fashioned by the hands of men that dwells in a temple fashioned by the hands of men is dependent upon men for identity and shelter. Interestingly enough, the sufficiency of God was also a tenet of Epicureanism. Paul brushed aside the necessity, let alone appropriateness, of idolatrous

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<sup>64</sup> Acts 17:24-26.

<sup>65</sup> Kistemaker, 640.

<sup>66</sup> Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 42:5.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 7:48-50.

<sup>68</sup> Exodus 3:14.

<sup>69</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: The One True God as Creator and Ruler and Sustainer of All,” InterVarsity Press, May 9, 2014, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/One-True-God-as-Creator-Ruler-Sustainer>.

worship, affirming that, conversely, it is God who *gives all men life and breath and everything else*.<sup>70</sup> Life begets life in the natural world, and it is ironic that pantheistic spirituality, which worships all things, fails to acknowledge that all life must originate with life itself. Paul affirmed the creation of human beings by God's direct act and declared that God's design was for various cultures ("every nation," *pan ethnos*) to cover the face of the earth in a harmonious patchwork of diversity.<sup>71</sup> While Stoicism looked at humankind in its diversity and urged it to consider itself one community, "even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field," Paul affirmed both our unity and our diversity.<sup>72</sup>

#### Acts 17:27-29

"God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill."<sup>73</sup>

Paul injected into his conversation the necessity of actively seeking the Divine, rather than acquiescing to their notion that the gods are disinteresting and unworthy of pursuit. In one sentence, Paul communicated that worship is far more than mental pontification from day to day but more so relational learning found in the context of the Divinity that one can befriend. The Athenian's "foreign" God is much bigger and grander, yet much more accessible, than the other gods they worshipped.

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<sup>70</sup> Genesis 1:29; 2:7; 9:3; Isaiah 42:5; Acts 14:17.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7; 10:5, 20, 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> Osborne.

<sup>73</sup> 7-29.

To further his point, Paul utilized a unique strategy with his listeners. The scripture may not have been credible or authoritative to them, but Paul did quote one of their own familiar, credible poets. “For in him we live and move and have our being.”<sup>74</sup> Using transferred classicism, Paul connected with his audience through their poetry about Zeus, as if to say, “You are right, but it is Christ – not Zeus – you are to look to as God.” By quoting their poets, Paul made a connection between their culture and the God who created them. While wanting to accentuate the nearness and accessibility of a loving, relevant God, Paul further established a rapport by quoting two poems verbatim that extol the virtues of the god Zeus.<sup>75</sup> Placing their poems in Paul’s mouth placed Paul’s God in their minds, while showing that Paul was not just a foreigner with a foreign god, but one well versed in what meant most to them. Paul cared. Perhaps deducing that Paul genuinely cared about them may have led some to conclude that if the herald cared, than so too must his sender, “for in him we live and move and have our being.”

The second quotation Paul used originates in a poem by Aratus (315-240 B.C.), who was a native of Cilicia in Asia Minor, and thus a compatriot of Paul. It was likely that the poem was later quoted by Minos of Crete.<sup>76</sup> Paul accentuated the fact that “we are his offspring.” Paul was not agreeing with the context of the poem that intimates that we are the offspring of Zeus, but he was making the point that these words were also applicable within Christian teaching. At the very least, Paul was decreasing the likelihood that his listeners would immediately dismiss his teaching as too far out there. Paul successfully used words that were credible and applicable to his audience to make and

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<sup>74</sup> Michael Ward, “Narnia & the Imagination.” Lecture, Mere Apologetics: The Life & Literature of C.S. Lewis from The Queen’s College, Oxford, England, June 30, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Kistemaker, 636.

<sup>76</sup> Kistemaker, 636.

solidify the point that Christ is accessible, near, interested, and a “parent” to all mankind. Because life begets life, as God’s offspring, we live in his life, breathe in his life-giving power and move in his movements. God is vibrant. We are his offspring, and inanimate objects cannot beget life, nor do they breathe, nor are they the result of a man’s workmanship. Paul used the Athenians’ poets to echo the sentiments of Christ: “I am the way, the truth and the life,”<sup>77</sup> “and mankind is his creation not the other way around.”<sup>78</sup> “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”<sup>79</sup> For first-century Epicureans, the fact that God is the Father of humankind was challengingly good news. Paul provided them with an identity that showed them to be philosophers of far more value to God than simply a complex interplay of electrical impulses, chemical processes, subatomic DNA and environment.<sup>80</sup>

#### Acts 17:30-31

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”<sup>81</sup>

In the past, God overlooked ignorance among people in regards to sin. He, however, did not overlook sin altogether. God previously overlooked ignorance, except among those in Noah’s generation. History also records many later instances of people suffering the consequences of sin, as the Bible clearly depicts through the Israelites. Now,

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<sup>77</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>78</sup> Psalm 24:1.

<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>80</sup> “Commentary Acts 17:27-29,” Bible Gateway, January 2010, accessed May 7, 2014, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts17%3A27-29&version=NIV>.

<sup>81</sup> Acts 17:30-31.

post-cross and post-resurrection, all men are called to repentance. God commands all people everywhere to repent. The universality of mankind's sin dilemma is broader than the Athenian's limited, self-centered perspective of seeing gods specifically for themselves while arrogantly considering other "foreign god" possibilities. The interconnectedness of mankind throughout the history of the world reaches far beyond a single perspective formed on a single hill in one town by one group of people in a specific period of time. The Athenians, in keeping with Paul's letter to the Romans, were therefore without excuse, not only because of the display of God's invisible qualities in nature,<sup>82</sup> but at this point even more so because they had heard the truth first hand through God's herald. The consequences of ignoring Paul's proclamation were implicit: "...Should they continue in their false worship and fail to acknowledge his sole lordship of heaven and earth, their sin would no longer be a sin of ignorance (once overlooked) but a high-handed sin."<sup>83</sup> Paul's proclamation had now put them in a posture of responsibility to accept and repent or to reject and be judged without a Savior. Paul told them the truth, and they were then responsible for dealing with it. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"<sup>84</sup>

Now backed into a theological corner, the Athenians had to decide what to do concerning their idols, as those in Thessalonica did because of Paul's preaching. With the authority of an apostle, Paul described how the believers in Macedonia made a departure

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<sup>82</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>83</sup> Ballast, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Romans 10:14-15.

from idols in Thessalonica: "...They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."<sup>85</sup> The call to repentance was urgent, in that a day had been set for judgment. The Day of Judgment would take place regardless of one's views on the hereafter. Greek philosophers might have envisioned a judgment on souls in the hereafter as part of a reincarnation scheme, but they found the notion of a final judgment, as Paul declared it, incredible.<sup>86</sup>

The whole of Paul's presentation rested on the veracity of the resurrection of Christ. Paul offered the Areopagus the reality that the resurrection of Christ is the proof to all mankind that Jesus is Lord. Paul's theology was not rooted in ongoing, empty philosophical rhetoric but a demonstration of God's power in everyday life. Previously, Paul had declared these sentiments in Thessalonica: "...[O]ur gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction."<sup>87</sup> The Athenians were rich in pontification, but Paul was offering them a God of practice, a God who demonstrates his love through his death.<sup>88</sup> Paul presented a doctrine that flew in the face of all that Epicureans and Stoics believed. He did so with clarity and without compromise, yet he managed to meet them where they were, as he intersected with their culture using sources that were credible to them.

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<sup>85</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

<sup>86</sup> Grant R. Osborne, "The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, Conclusion: A Call for Radical Personal Change," InterVarsity Press, August, 2010 accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Conclusion-Call-Radical-Personal-Change>.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

<sup>88</sup> Romans 5:8.



## Varying Reactions of Those on the Areopagus

Acts 17:32-34

“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.”<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately, Luke portrays Paul’s discourse in Athens as a meeting of Greek intellectual wisdom with godly wisdom. Paul’s non truth-compromising connection with the Athenian culture provided his listeners with the tenets of the gospel. The result of the encounter was that a prominent member of the council, a lady of note, and several others became Christians.<sup>90</sup> Dionysius later became the Bishop of the Church in Athens, and legend has it that his wife Damaris worked beside him as new witnesses of Christ in an opposing, idolatrous culture.<sup>91</sup> Paul discharged his duties faithfully. Regardless of the mindset of any culture, an ambassador of Christ is to share the truth as though God himself were making an appeal.<sup>92</sup> The seed of the gospel was planted in Athens for the first time through Paul. Surely Paul knew that his introductory seed of the gospel would inevitably bear fruit that would last. The kingdom bears fruit from what is sown. Others come along to water, but ultimately God will make it grow.<sup>93</sup>

In retrospect, the Apostle Paul met the three criteria necessary to find validation in the eyes of the council at Areopagus. He faithfully proclaimed the gospel as a herald of

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<sup>89</sup> Acts 17:32-34.

<sup>90</sup> Kistemaker, 641.

<sup>91</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 364.

<sup>92</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>93</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

the Lord. Secondly, he explained that Christ is not only near but that he is accessible to those who seek him. Thirdly, Paul certainly provided proof of Christ's goodwill toward the Athenians by providing them with a potential bodily resurrection through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. Paul communicated brilliantly his proclamation of the gospel to the Greek culture, which was steeped in intellectualism, and he did so in a manner that would be helpful for many doubters today to hear. The sexually charged college culture in the twenty-first century is in need not only of the gospel but of a thorough explanation of how this loving God wants them to be stewards of their sexuality.

### **The Sexual Promiscuity in First Century Corinth and the Apostle Paul's Reaction**

From Athens Paul went on to Corinth, where he addressed the sexual immorality taking place in an intense sexually charged culture. The immoral dilemma in ancient Corinth and the Apostle Paul's writings to the church in Corinth provide a modern day evangelist insight into how to relate truth to a sexually promiscuous culture. Research appearing earlier in the previous chapter highlighted the level of sexual promiscuity on college campuses today, as well as its consequences. Corinth and modern day college campuses have much in common, in that each of these subcultures has earned an immoral reputation based on its sexual mores, and that each has illustrated an over-excitement toward "Greek" influence and athletic games. Greek influence on American campuses originates in an ideology common to some fraternities and sororities. Corinth would have had much in common with many colleges today that foster sexual freedom, fraternity and sorority party life and the welcome excitement of athletic competition.

An exegetical treatment of Paul's writing to the newly established church in Corinth provides valuable insight for establishing an effective means to evangelize postmodern college students who are unabashedly sexually active. In Corinth, Paul addressed the sexual behavior of those who were greatly influenced by a sexually charged spirituality in culture.

Corinth was home to many gods, including Hera Argaea, the goddess of marriage and the sexual life of women; Asklepios, the god of health whose temple was not unlike modern health clubs; Apollo, the god of healing; and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation. Her temple was a focal point of the city that crowned the Acrocorinth.<sup>94</sup> The temple of Aphrodite was home to as many as 1,000 pagan-priestess prostitutes. A sexual union with a prostitute was seen and understood to be an act of worship. Sexuality was in many ways tied to the gods. Dinner parties held in precincts of pagan temples were more than likely a main location for sexual acts.<sup>95</sup> Like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open and unbridled immorality. The worship of Aphrodite fostered prostitution in the name of religion. Indeed, the immorality of Corinth was widely known. The Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality as those in Corinth were accustomed to doing."<sup>96</sup> There were two "types" of marriage: sacred marriage was defined as the sexual union between two 'divine' persons or one 'divine' and one human person. Normal marriage was a marriage between two human persons.<sup>97</sup> "Many Greeks did not perceive any immorality in

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<sup>94</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 12-19.

<sup>95</sup> Witherington, 13.

<sup>96</sup> "Ancient Corinth:Agora," Ancient Agora, January 2010, accessed June 21, 2015, <http://www.ancient-corinth.com/agora.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Witherington, 16.

prostitution... and Paul's polemic against sexual excess"<sup>98</sup> is addressed to Corinthian Christians who had in local spirit coined the slogan "All things are lawful for me."<sup>99</sup> The modern day prevalence of pornography can be compared to the best description of Corinth, a city said to be riddled with "porneia," a Greek word meaning "resorting to prostitutes," as in the context of the Corinthian culture, which was steeped in pre-marital, extra-marital and unnatural sexual relations.<sup>100</sup>

In this context, Paul wrote a second time to the church in Corinth to address immoral behavior among them. As one sent by Christ himself, Paul provided insight on how to deal with issues of sexual immorality not only among those who follow Christ but also among those living in a sexually charged culture without Christ. Paul's methodology in Corinth was different from but not incompatible with his ministry approach in Athens.

### **Exegetical Treatment of 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 & 6; 6:12-20**

#### **1 Corinthians 5:1-2**

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?"<sup>101</sup>

Paul was flabbergasted over two poignant issues in the Corinthian church. First there was sexual immorality among the believers in Corinth. Secondly, and perhaps of

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<sup>98</sup> 1 Corinthians 5 to 7.

<sup>99</sup> John E. Stambaugh, and David L. Balch, "Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture," July 14, 1986, accessed June 21, 2014, [http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.gordonconwell.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/nlebk\\_41447\\_AN?sid=f8936033-7af4-4908-8e08-5b25089a4364@sessionmgr113&vid=3&format=EB](http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.gordonconwell.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/nlebk_41447_AN?sid=f8936033-7af4-4908-8e08-5b25089a4364@sessionmgr113&vid=3&format=EB).

<sup>100</sup> Strong's Concordance," Blue Letter Bible, January 2011, accessed April 7, 2014, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/niv/1co/5/1/s\\_1067001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/niv/1co/5/1/s_1067001).

<sup>101</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

greater severity, was the fact that the church was seemingly proud of the matter. This predicament troubled Paul. Even the local, sexually immoral, secular establishment saw such behavior as unacceptable. A man was sleeping with his own stepmother; even pagans did not tolerate this kind of deviance. Regardless of whether the man's father was alive or dead, this kind of behavior was condemned in the Old Testament.<sup>102</sup>

The hubris in the Corinthian church was Paul's key and genuine concern. Perhaps there was no grieving among the believers because there was no conviction over their sin. There in turn was no conviction because there was no understanding of the law, or perhaps there was an ambivalence toward the authority of scripture or of Paul, or both. The fundamental problem here was not just the sin of one unnamed individual, but more so the failure of the Corinthian spiritual community to deal with the sin; indeed, their sense of pride in tolerating it was the problem. Possibly, the church body had developed a theology that could accommodate such immorality. Instead, Paul charged the "body" with the responsibility of exercising discipline by excommunicating the offender ("removed from among you").<sup>103</sup> The Corinthians were proud, or *physioo* in the Greek vernacular. They were validating one another's viewpoints; they were prideful and arrogant.<sup>104</sup> Ironically, the church had become less holy than the secular Corinthians, which no doubt damaged their Christian witness. The modern day secular observations of the church regarding sexual behavior can ultimately lead to a justification for sexual promiscuity in culture. The standard or witness of the church is a message of compromise; thus, people are following such a lead in everyday life. It is not only the outside world that is in danger of polluting the community of faith but the immorality that has been

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<sup>102</sup> Leviticus 16:8.

<sup>103</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

<sup>104</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

manifested in the church that in turn weakens the witness of Christ in the eyes and minds of the secular community.

1 Corinthians 5:6

“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?”<sup>105</sup>

First-century societies were familiar with leaven or yeast, particularly the Jews, for during the Passover they purged their homes of old leaven, which would later represent the sanctifying work of Christ.<sup>106</sup> Leaven obviously represented evil in Paul’s symbolism. The Corinthians also knew much about the symbolism of leaven. Leftover leaven that was set back to be introduced into a new batch of dough was beneficial to the rising of newly baked bread. When moistened with water, at times bacteria would be introduced into the leaven. In that case, the bacteria would be kneaded into the new batch of dough,<sup>107</sup> but it did not take very much bacteria to spoil an entire new loaf of bread. Metaphorically, the incestuous Corinthians’ sin was the bacteria infested leaven. The church was the new loaf. Because of the infestation of bacteria, the integrity of the church’s witness was compromised. It appears as though, Paul recognized the severity of the immoral behavior of the man previously mentioned in chapter five by insisting that the man be excommunicated from the church, with the goal of his eventual humble and contrite return.<sup>108</sup> Paul saw the need to discipline the man in such an extreme way because the effects of ignoring such behavior would be detrimental to the effectiveness of

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<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:6.

<sup>106</sup> Kistemaker, 165.

<sup>107</sup> Kistemaker, 165.

<sup>108</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:2.

the church. Paul understood that sexual immorality has an inherent pull or power in any community, whether faith-based or otherwise. Sexual sin does not take place in a vacuum.

### **Introduction to a Divine Definition of Christian Sexual Ethics**

#### **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

The errant sexual ethic of the Corinthian believers centered on a misconstrued, self-serving definition of freedom in Christ and a non-biblical, damaging view of the human body and its integration with the spirit or soul of man. There are appropriate times and reasons to accentuate the negative aspects of errant sexuality and its consequences, but there is also a time to accentuate the beauty and purpose of the human body and sexual purity-holiness.<sup>109</sup> In the sixth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul provides one of the most beautiful and constructive contributions to Christian sexual ethics that appears in any written work, whether in or out of the New Testament.<sup>110</sup>

#### **1 Corinthians 6:12**

“‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything.”<sup>111</sup>

The church was saying, “I have the right to do anything,” yet Paul’s response dealt with a greater reality. Not all they were doing was beneficial, and the potential to be controlled by such behavior was not only possible but likely. It appears as though a similarly errant ideology has been adopted in whole or in part among those in the church today. On some level, an “antinomian” philosophy has crept into their collective mindset. The word “antinomianism” comes from Greek and means *lawless*. It is a pejorative term

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<sup>109</sup> Stott, 94.

<sup>110</sup> Stott, 98.

<sup>111</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:12.

for the teaching that Christians are under no obligation to obey the laws of ethics or morality. Such a charge is usually leveled by one group against an opposing group.<sup>112</sup> In Corinth, Paul was the opposing group. The errant antinomian perspective denies sin in the life of a Christ-follower, for to be without law means there then is no transgression of the law and thus no sin. Paul was accustomed to dealing with such issues. This he wrote to the church in Rome: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”<sup>113</sup> If all things are permissible by individual “right,” there would be no need for conviction, confession, forgiveness, or a Savior. Thus the Apostle John’s directive to “confess your sins because the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us” would be out of line.<sup>114</sup> The Corinthians, like all followers of Christ, were called to live holy and consecrated lives. “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”<sup>115</sup> The Corinthians were rationalizing their lawlessness and taking liberty with the definition of “liberty.” Ironically, many in Corinth were twisting the truth by proclaiming liberty while actually experiencing the bondage caused by the behaviors they saw as “their right to practice.”<sup>116</sup> At the root of the Corinthian philosophical dilemma was the reality that they were not only “conforming” to the patterns of Greco-Roman culture; they were actually exceeding the acceptable immorality that existed within their culture. Similarly, members of the church today are far from being “transformed by the renewing of their minds.”<sup>117</sup> Their mindset is destructive to say the

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<sup>112</sup> “Antinomianism,” Theopedia, January 2010, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.theopedia.com/Antinomianism>.

<sup>113</sup> Romans 6:1-2.

<sup>114</sup> 1 John 10:9.

<sup>115</sup> Hebrews 12:14.

<sup>116</sup> Witherington, 168.

<sup>117</sup> Romans 12:2.



least. On one hand, they claim to know Christ, but on the other, they deny or dilute his death on the cross through their prideful ambivalence to his call to be holy. The Apostle John said it this way: “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”<sup>118</sup>

#### 1 Corinthians 6:13-14

“You say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.’ The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.”<sup>119</sup>

Certainly Paul had walked the streets of Corinth as he had those in Athens. He saw and knew of the temples, the idolatry and the prostitution that were taking place in the name of Aphrodite. It may have been difficult for the people of Corinth to see a dichotomy between true biblical worship and secular worship inclusive of sexual behavior due to the ongoing inseparability between the two behaviors in Corinth. From the time Corinthian children could walk the city streets, they were conditioned to make such a connection between worship and sexual behavior. Now, however, as “infants in Christ,”<sup>120</sup> they seemed to dismiss the importance of keeping one’s body sexually pure, as they failed to see the significance of polluting their relationship with Christ by committing sexually immoral acts or by dismissing incestuous acts as non-consequential.

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<sup>118</sup> 1 John 2:3-6.

<sup>119</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:13-14.

<sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:1.

As if an errant antinomianism were not enough, this young church was acting as if they were in part adopting a degree of Gnosticism that justified their conduct concerning their bodies.<sup>121</sup> These arrogant believers had developed a skewed perspective on the relationship between one's body and one's spirit. Many Corinthians had unadvisedly adopted the theology that salvation did not involve the body.<sup>122</sup> Biblically speaking, they should not have used their bodies for immorality and also used their bodies in worship only to think nothing of the contradiction. The sexually immoral within the church had acted upon their appetite for sex and had thus impacted their immediate, localized connection to the spirit realm. If their appetite for sex could be understood as a longing for genuine things of the spirit, such as acceptance, identity and true love, then an evangelist could perhaps help them to correct and redefine this twisted connection. Their bodies were created for so much more than what they are experiencing. C.S. Lewis described such a distortion in this way: "Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."<sup>123</sup>

"The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."<sup>124</sup> Paul sought to deepen the Corinthians' understanding of the

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<sup>121</sup> Kistemaker, 612.

<sup>122</sup> Witherington, 164.

<sup>123</sup> C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," preached originally as a sermon in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, on June 8, 1942; published in *Theology*, November, 1941, and by the S.P.C.K., 1942. Accessed December 9, 2015, available from <http://www.verber.com/mark/xian/weight-of-glory.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:13.

divinely ordained purposes for their physical bodies, while also accentuating the resurrection power available to them to walk in sexual purity in Christ.

By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Through this power, the Corinthian Christians needed to internalize a holy perspective on their bodies and a holy perspective on marriage, as was not in any way visible in the incestuous and adulterous relationship that initiated Paul's rebuke.

1 Corinthians 6:15-17

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”<sup>125</sup>

Paul proceeded to say that every Christian is in a sense attached to Christ as a limb or member of him.<sup>126</sup> It is nonsensical to attempt to remain in such an attachment only to be at the same time united with a prostitute. In saying so, Paul was making the point that sexual intercourse is more than physical; it has spiritual implications to be considered.<sup>127</sup> Essayist Wendell Berry provides his insights on this truth, in keeping with Scripture:

It is not possible to devalue the body and value the soul. The body, cast loose from the soul, is on its own. Devalued...the body...sets up a counterpart economy of its own, based also on the laws of competition, in which it devalues and exploits the spirit. These two economies maintain themselves at each other's expense, living upon the other's loss, collaborating without ceasing in mutual

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<sup>125</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:15-17.

<sup>126</sup> Witherington, 169.

<sup>127</sup> Witherington, 169.

futility and absurdity. You cannot devalue the body and value the soul—or value anything else.<sup>128</sup>

This mysterious physical and spiritual union is dangerous outside of a God-ordained covenant of marriage, for it involves one's entire being, which is reserved first for the Lord<sup>129</sup> and second for a spouse in Christ. The human body is the means by which Christ revealed himself as the mediator between God and man. Christ in the flesh, God's glory in the midst of a fallen world. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>130</sup> Christ, in the frailty of a human body, experienced fatigue, hurt, betrayal, loss and even temptation. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."<sup>131</sup> To be in relationship with Christ as Messiah, one cannot overlook the physical historicity of Christ, his incarnation and subsequent bodily resurrection. "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."<sup>132</sup>

#### 1 Corinthians 6:18

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, 149, 265.

<sup>129</sup> Matthew 22:37.

<sup>130</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>131</sup> Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>132</sup> 1 John 4:2-3.

<sup>133</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18.

This thesis-project paper has thus far included review, research and documentation regarding the ramifications of sexual promiscuity. The destructive power of sexually promiscuity is obvious. The emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual wreckage caused by such promiscuity prompted Paul to admonish the Corinthians to flee from such immorality. His love for the Corinthians was best communicated through a pointed admonition.

All sin is transgression of God's law, yet in another sense, not all sin is the same in its effect. In is one thing to think about killing another person; it is quite another to actually do so. The latter has more of a lasting consequence. It is one thing to fantasize sexually about someone other than one's spouse. It is quite another situation to actually have intercourse with that person. Creating an inappropriate sexual union with another person is unlike other sins: it involves one's very body in a union with others and is therefore a sin against oneself and the other person.<sup>134</sup> Christianity places a high value on the human body. Created by God and for God, the human body is a visible and tangible measurement of God's commitment and love.<sup>135</sup>

#### 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."<sup>136</sup>

Six times in the sixth chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul asked the same rhetorical question: "Do you not know...?" He says to them, "Though they were at one time greedy thieves and wrongdoers and sexually immoral and without Christ, they had come to a

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<sup>134</sup> Witherington, 169.

<sup>135</sup> Stott, 99.

<sup>136</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

saving knowledge of the Savior.”<sup>137</sup> Despite their confession, they, to Paul’s consternation, still seemed not to realize that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit. This seemed somewhat baffling to the apostle. There remained some kind of disconnection between their identity in Christ and their behavior in his church. Perhaps the power of their culture had caused them to solely associate temples with sexuality. Perhaps they saw sexuality and spirituality as inseparable. Physical bodies, which are to be holy, pure, and set apart as God’s created vessels, are to be hospitable tabernacles wherein the Spirit of God dwells and feels at home. The Corinthians were truly missing the crux of Paul’s theology. Unlike other philosophical perspectives, a Christian’s body is to be a sacred tabernacle for the Presence of God: “Christ in us the hope of glory.”<sup>138</sup>

The Corinthians acted and spoke as though their bodies were their own. They saw themselves as having ownership over their own flesh. Paul saw something totally different. To Paul, a follower of Christ is responsible for exercising proper stewardship regarding one’s body, which has been purchased by God via the blood of Christ. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”<sup>139</sup> As in every other way, God the Father has given mankind a perfect gift and the means to use that gift to worship him. The Corinthians had seemingly rewritten the deed to the human body and claimed personal ownership. The very holy hands that are to be raised in prayer and the very lips that are ordained to praise Him were being used not to honor God but to join incestuously to another. In their longing for meaning and intimacy, some Corinthians had divorced themselves from holy, protective

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<sup>137</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:11.

<sup>138</sup> Colossians 1:27.

<sup>139</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

moral boundaries, as others callously looked the other way. In either scenario, the Lord went without honor.

### **Conclusions Regarding Paul's Written Response to the Corinthians**

Paul had successfully shared the truth with a perplexed congregation living in a very confused and dark culture. He identified the source of the problem and introduced an immediate solution. Paul challenged his audience with a higher calling. He called them out of their sexual immorality, filth and bondage to the purity and liberation of sexuality lived out according to God's creational intention. Biblically speaking, one's sexuality was never intended to be so polluted and confusing. In the following verses, Paul invited his readers to a new and living way, free of immorality and shame, which postures the church to be the vital witness that Corinth was greatly in need of seeing. Paul elaborated on their solution in the following way:

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command.<sup>140</sup>

### **An Introduction of Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son**

The gospel of Luke is an "orderly account" of a "careful investigation," written to lead its reader to a place of certainty concerning what has been taught about Jesus

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<sup>140</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

Christ.<sup>141</sup> A highlight of Luke's Gospel is found in the fifteenth chapter. The parabolic discourse appearing there is one cohesive, thematic unit of teaching that Jesus shared as three parables.<sup>142</sup>

The first parable deals with a lost sheep. The second parable addresses a lost coin, and the final parable concerns a lost son. The parables are progressively weightier in their intended kingdom meaning and significance. The value of each lost possession increases drastically as each parable unfolds. In the first parable, one of a hundred sheep is lost. In the second parable, one of ten coins is lost. In the last parable, the reader initially learns that one of two sons is lost, only to later realize that in fact both sons are lost.

Proper biblical exegesis dictates an awareness that the lost sheep simply wandered away, as is its nature.<sup>143</sup> The coin, an inanimate object, could in no way willfully displace itself. The prodigal, however, intentionally determined and purposed himself to go off on his own, thus detaching himself from his father, family, clan and village, regardless of the cost to all involved, including himself. Through these parables, Jesus personally addresses the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law and their willful rejection of him as the Son of God. He addresses their lack of understanding regarding the lost sheep of Israel.

To adequately understand Jesus' purpose in sharing these parables with the murmuring religious leaders, it is imperative to understand the first-century, Middle-Eastern cultural context in which the parable originated. An accurate exegetical analysis of this central New Testament passage, considering the appropriate middle-eastern,

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<sup>141</sup> Luke 1:3-4.

<sup>142</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>143</sup> Isaiah 53:6.



missiological context, can remove evangelistic “blind spots” that exist in reaching collegiate prodigals of twenty-first century, Western culture today. More central to the exegetical analysis to follow is a well-researched understanding of the Middle-Eastern perspective. Perhaps Christians today could find a more effective means of evangelizing sexually active collegiate prodigals in an alternative approach to the current “Western” one.

### **An Exegetical Treatment of Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

#### **Luke 15:1-3**

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ Then Jesus told them this parable...”<sup>144</sup>

This particular verbal encounter prompted Jesus to share a parable that he intended to educate if not enlighten the religious leaders concerning the very nature and essence of God and his relationship to tax collectors and sinners.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were muttering with disdain amongst themselves concerning the company that Jesus was keeping. Specifically, Jesus was welcoming and eating with tax collectors and sinners.<sup>145</sup> In this context, the Pharisees had two main problems with Jesus that they considered worthy of “murmuring or muttering” about. Primarily, they were troubled by Jesus’ welcoming or receiving (in the Greek, “*prosdechomai*”) of sinners. Secondly, they did not feel that he should have shared meals with sinners.

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<sup>144</sup> Luke 15:1-3.

<sup>145</sup> Luke 15:1-3.

To welcome a sinner as Jesus did, is to receive that sinner into fellowship. The Apostle Paul uses the same Greek word, *prosdechomai*,<sup>146</sup> to describe the receiving of brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>147</sup> To a Pharisee, this fellowship with tax collectors and sinners was abhorrent. The tax collectors abused their own people for their own benefit and for the benefit of the oppressive Romans who employed them. To the Pharisees, Jesus was in fellowship with the enemy. To Jesus, however, the real enemy was blinding the Pharisees from seeing the truth. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”<sup>148</sup> Not only was Jesus welcoming the “enemy,” but in the company of the “enemy,” he was breaking bread that supposedly defiled him. In first-century, Middle-Eastern culture, to eat with a man was to willingly enter into a sacramental act, signifying acceptance.<sup>149</sup> It was in this grossly scandalous context that Jesus shared the last of the three cohesive parables that appear in Luke 15.

#### Luke 15:11

“Jesus continued: ‘There was a man who had two sons.’”<sup>150</sup>

Though readers often refer to this parable as the Parable of the Lost Son, the parable actually concerns two sons and a compassionate father.<sup>151</sup> The prodigal who departs from the father’s property represents irreligious sinners. The compassionate father represents Jesus, and the disgruntled elder brother represents the ruling religious

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<sup>146</sup> “Strong’s Concordance Luke 15:2,” Blue Letter Bible, January 2010, accessed January 7, 2016, [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org).

<sup>147</sup> Romans 16:2 & Philippians 2:29.

<sup>148</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

<sup>149</sup> Bailey, 29.

<sup>150</sup> Luke 15:11.

<sup>151</sup> Bailey, 40.

establishment, namely Jesus' "righteous" audience.<sup>152</sup> To fail to note the poor attitude of the elder brother in the parable is to withhold a mirror from the faces of the religiously arrogant Pharisees.

Luke 15:12

"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them."<sup>153</sup>

Simply put, should a son in a Middle-Eastern culture request his share of the estate and his desire to control it, he is being impatient for his father's death.<sup>154</sup> Joachim Jeremias describes legal provisions for the value of a property to be deeded to a son while it remains under the dominion and authority of a father until his death.<sup>155</sup> This legal transaction was both culturally appropriate and respectful. However, the prodigal in Jesus' parable requests a deed of ownership and total control of a portion of his father's property even though his father is still living.

This younger son is committing mutiny and publicly shaming his father. He is not breaking any kind of Jewish law or custom; in fact, as the younger son, he is entitled to one-third of the estate.<sup>156</sup> So, although the son is not breaking the law, he is breaking the heart of his father. He is not only harming his immediate family; he is lessening the financial value of his entire clan and village.<sup>157</sup> Through the story of the younger son's selfishness, Jesus accentuated the rebellion of mankind, including Israel and her leaders, against God.

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<sup>152</sup> Bailey, 36.

<sup>153</sup> Luke 15:12.

<sup>154</sup> Bailey, 40.

<sup>155</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p 128. quoted in Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 41.

<sup>156</sup> Deuteronomy 21:17.

<sup>157</sup> Bailey, 43.

The younger son is also evading his responsibility inherent to receiving an inheritance. By avoiding the use of the word “inheritance” in his request, the younger son seemingly feels relieved of the responsibilities of being an heir, which include leadership in the clan and a duty to administer the property and defend the honor of the community.<sup>158</sup> The younger boy “wants the weightiness of his share without the weightiness of what is expected of him by the clan after he receives it.” He felt entitled but not without any corresponding responsibility.

Luke 15:13

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”<sup>159</sup>

At this point of the parable, it is apparent that the father would have to transfer his deed to his younger son in order to expedite a cashing out of the property, while the son’s plan for using this cash was to secure his departure from his father, family, clan, and village. The Greek phrase for “gathered all” or “got together” in verse 13 is “synagagon panta,” a phrase indicating that the younger son had “cashed out” his newly acquired asset. This was not culturally appropriate and even more significantly would have been like a slap to the face of his father. In a short period of time, the prodigal sold or leveraged the property, thus grossly lessening the value of the family and clan assets.<sup>160</sup> Intimated here is the possibility that the son expedited the property sale by asking for a less than an ideal price, rather than charging a potentially higher price that he could have received through patient diligence in marketing. At this point in the parable, the son

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<sup>158</sup> Bailey, 43.

<sup>159</sup> Luke 15:13.

<sup>160</sup> Bailey, 42.

seems no longer to see the value of his father's oversight or direction. Instead, he sees himself as well-prepared and resourced to go his own way.

Once far away from the influence of his father, family, and village, the prodigal began to squander not only his resources but his opportunity as well. His squandering was not because of poor business decisions or a poor economy or less than ideal investments but because of wild living. He spent his resources on various fleeting interests, scattering them like sheep who get lost along the way or like an enemy scatters in battle.<sup>161</sup> There is no indication at this point in the parable of what the younger son was experiencing emotionally.

Luke 15:14

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.”<sup>162</sup>

Now without his initial provisions, the younger son began to find that additional outside resources in this far away land had become limited or extinct as well. One could easily conclude that an immediate return home would seem prudent, but the prodigal was not ready for the confrontation that would entail. In his Middle-Eastern culture, upon returning home after squandering his father's and his community's legacy, a reception known as the *Kezazah* would have been waiting for him. “*Kezazah*” means “cutting off.”<sup>163</sup> Within the ceremony, the family and community would break a large pot in front of the one who squandered his family's inheritance, indicating a “breaking” of communication and relationship with the one who had returned. When a member of the community traveled away from his own people and selfishly diminished the value of the

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<sup>161</sup> Bailey, 53.

<sup>162</sup> Luke 15:14.

<sup>163</sup> Bailey, 53.

community, they would then see him as one without rights and without bridges upon his return.<sup>164</sup> For the younger son in this parable, this certainly would have been a deterrent to returning home. In light of the Kezazah ceremony, a decision to return would certainly indicate that one was experiencing a deep and grievous need.

Luke 15:15

“So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.”<sup>165</sup>

Some translations indicate that the prodigal “joined himself to” a citizen of the Gentile country. The word “joined” or in the New International Version, “hired himself,” indicates that this connection was annoying or unwanted from the Gentile citizen’s perspective. The word in Greek is “kollao,” which originated with the word “kola,” meaning glue.<sup>166</sup> The prodigal connected himself to one whom he thought could help him in his dire need, yet in his neediness he was likely unwanted. Being an Israelite may have been an indication to others that he was not interested or dependable to work among swine. Perhaps as a means of disconnecting with the prodigal, the citizen of that land offered him a job that he was sure the prodigal would reject.<sup>167</sup> The prodigal’s acceptance of the position indicates his level of decline and desperation.

Luke 15:16

“He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Bailey, 54.

<sup>165</sup> Luke 15:15.

<sup>166</sup> Bailey, 56.

<sup>167</sup> Bailey, 57.

<sup>168</sup> Luke 15:16.

The prodigal longed to fill his stomach. The Greek words here indicate that he deeply coveted the “carob pods.”<sup>169</sup> He longed to share in the pigs’ cuisine. While Jesus’ parable does not specifically describe the “wild living” in which the prodigal engaged, it seems safe to conclude that the wayward son had now experienced many of both the pleasures and the pains associated with every socio-economic strata of his time. It is at this stage of his decline that his want far exceeds his shame. Even a return home to face his father and the Kezazah seemed preferable to the pigs’ pods he could not even secure.

Luke 15:17-19

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’”<sup>170</sup>

The prodigal “came to his senses.” In Middle-Eastern lingo, he “got smart.”<sup>171</sup> For 1800 years, no Arabic text associated with this parable ever mentioned any repentance associated with this decision to return to his homeland.<sup>172</sup> The decision to return was rooted in hunger, not regret. Perhaps the son calculated the timing of his return by the strength he had left to make the journey home, more than by his level of remorse or desire for restoration. The prodigal was still being driven by hunger just as he had been when he first left home, a hunger for freedom and independence. Perhaps he longed to work as a skilled craftsman rather than as an unpaid servant, as he hoped to provide for himself and pay back the money he squandered. It appears as though the prodigal was

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<sup>169</sup> Bailey, 58.

<sup>170</sup> Luke 15:17-19.

<sup>171</sup> Bailey, 59.

<sup>172</sup> Bailey, 59.

concerned about breaking the law and less concerned about having broken his father's heart.<sup>173</sup> If so, Jesus would certainly have been directing this lesson at the Pharisees who were listening to the Christ as he taught.

“I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.’”<sup>174</sup> These words of the prodigal were also the words of the unrepentant Egyptian Pharaoh to Moses.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps the repentance the prodigal needed was not initially present when he went to meet his father. The prodigal, like the Pharaoh, seems to have been planning to manipulate the situation at hand to secure a skilled craftsmen position at his father's homestead, thereby redeeming himself by paying off his debt.<sup>176</sup>

#### Luke 15:20

“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”<sup>177</sup>

Upon his return, the prodigal encountered a most unorthodox reception. No father in the Orient would respond to a rebellious son, upon his return, as did the father in Jesus' parable. No father in such a culture would respond with visceral compassion that precipitates running or racing towards his rebellious son. The Apostle Paul used a similar word for “running” or “racing” to describe a foot race in a stadium.<sup>178</sup> The Pharisees knew that no man would willingly shame himself by girding up his robe to expose his

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<sup>173</sup> Bailey, 59.

<sup>174</sup> Luke 15: 18.

<sup>175</sup> Exodus 10:16.

<sup>176</sup> Bailey, 60.

<sup>177</sup> Luke 15:20.

<sup>178</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 2:2, 2 Thessalonians 3:1.



loins as he raced through the community.<sup>179</sup> But in this parable, the father, fueled by compassion, subjected himself to public shame. So too, Jesus, out of compassion, became one with mankind's shame on his crucifix.<sup>180</sup> Thus, at this point in the parable, Christ's incarnation is evident as the redemptive and restorative mediation for his children, as the prodigal's compassionate father demonstrates in this parable.<sup>181</sup>

The father raced to embrace and to kiss his son. The word “katephilesen” indicates a kissing one over and over again, which in Middle-Eastern culture was a natural expression of deep compassion.<sup>182</sup> Expecting a Kezazah ceremony with a broken pot and the burning of relational bridges, the prodigal received an embrace of togetherness and repeated kisses. How unorthodox this would have appeared to the Pharisees!

#### Luke 15:21-24

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”<sup>183</sup>

True repentance takes place in the context of true love. The prodigal, overwhelmed by the unexpected and unimaginable reception he received, was broken not by hunger or regret or by a ritualized ceremony but by a father's love. Once he had experienced brokenness, his confession meant something. No longer seeking to

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<sup>179</sup> Bailey, 67.

<sup>180</sup> Hebrews 12:2, Philippians 2:8.

<sup>181</sup> Bailey, 69.

<sup>182</sup> Bailey, 68.

<sup>183</sup> Luke 15:21-24.

manipulate, the prodigal was restored. Humility abounds in light of mercy and grace. The prodigal received a robe, symbolizing honor, and a ring, symbolizing authority. One's shame is deeply evident in the presence of honor, its antithesis.<sup>184</sup> By giving his son the ring, the father was making a most profound statement. The father now sees as trustworthy the prodigal now returned. Customarily speaking, the legal document that had previously transferred the land to the younger son had likely been executed with a signet ring. The prodigal returned would now actually wear such a ring, despite his failings.<sup>185</sup> In addition to his ring and his robe, the father provided his now returned son with sandals. Only unpaid servants were accustomed to going barefoot.

As there was a celebration upon the return of the lost sheep and the recovered coin, there too was a celebration for the return of the prodigal. Jesus also said, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."<sup>186</sup> The study of the text in the Gospel of Luke does not elaborate upon the body language or the facial expressions of the Pharisees hearing the narrative, but surely that was an interesting sight, not unlike the elder brother's reaction to seeing his brother's unexpected return and certainly unexpected reception.

A fatted calf was a special treat, in that it was high quality, grain-fed beef, an unusual delicacy in most any village.<sup>187</sup> By killing the fatted calf, not only was the father demonstrating his acceptance of his son, but he was also assuring the acceptance of the village as well by invoking the participation of every segment of the community. The

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<sup>184</sup> Mischke, 220.

<sup>185</sup> Bailey, 71.

<sup>186</sup> Luke 15:7.

<sup>187</sup> Bailey, 72.

servants dressed the son, others prepared the meal, and the elders in the town were invited to the feast.<sup>188</sup> This Middle-Eastern community was being informed through the father's actions and invitations that his son had returned, and the occasion was worthy of a collaborative celebration. The father was leading the community through a righteous and pure demonstration of grace in his village.

Luke 15:25

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.”<sup>189</sup>

Landowners did not labor in their own fields, but they did oversee those who labored under their employ.<sup>190</sup> The elder brother returning from the field that evening would not have been aware of the prodigal's return or of the pending celebration. Unbeknownst to him, he was walking into a shocking situation for which he was obviously ill prepared. The sound of music certainly alerted him of this deviation from the norm. He needed clarification as a member of the family and as one in a position of leadership as to what exactly was taking place.

Luke 15:26

“So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.”<sup>191</sup>

The use of the word “servant” (“pais”) can denote a “servant” or a “young boy.”<sup>192</sup> It was not likely that a servant would be outside during the celebration; more likely, that local youth would be excluded from the feast but wanting to see the festivities taking place in

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<sup>188</sup> Bailey, 72.

<sup>189</sup> Luke 15:25.

<sup>190</sup> Bailey, 78.

<sup>191</sup> Luke 15:26.

<sup>192</sup> “Strong's Concordance Luke 15:26,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 7, 2016. [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org).

the courtyard.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, the elder brother was likely seeking information concerning the party from a young boy who knew about it from the happenings of the day in and around the village. The elder brother was apparently one of only a few to not yet know that his very own brother had returned.

Luke 15:27

“‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’”<sup>194</sup>

To the young boy, the fact that there was a celebration going on seemed most appropriate, a stark contrast to the elder brother’s reaction. As the community focused on the fact that the wayward son had returned safe and sound, the son’s elder brother drew a competing conclusion.

Luke 15:28

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.”<sup>195</sup>

Jesus’ choice of words in telling the parable was certainly strategic. He said that the father “has him back safe and sound”; the King James translation says, “he hath received him safe and sound.”<sup>196</sup> The Greek word used here, “hygiaino,” means “good health” but also refers to the peace or shalom that lead to reconciliation.<sup>197</sup> The elder brother was receiving the news that the restoration of his brother’s place in the family had already begun; there was no need for him to enter the celebration to express his defiant opposition during the festivities. His anger then ensued in part because of the absence of

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<sup>193</sup> Bailey, 80.

<sup>194</sup> Luke 15:27.

<sup>195</sup> Luke 15:28.

<sup>196</sup> Luke 15:27 KJV.

<sup>197</sup> Bailey, 81.

an opportunity to make his strong case against the injustice he was experiencing. His younger brother had already been received by his father and restored to the family.<sup>198</sup>

In a Middle-Eastern culture, it would have been quite unusual and embarrassing for the host of the party to leave his guests only to plead with his own son to join the gathering. To do so in front of the young boy and his cohorts was an even greater reason for embarrassment.<sup>199</sup> It was also customary for such a momentous occasion to honor the guests at the celebration by placing a son, in this case the elder brother, as a head waiter of sorts, thus saying to the guests that they honor the family by attending.<sup>200</sup> Not only does the father see a need to plead with his older son to come in, but his guests are slighted by his unwillingness to serve and honor them. This is the second time in the parable that the father is subjected to shame and disgrace. The first shameful account was public, as was this subsequent act of rebellion by his older son.<sup>201</sup>

The actions of the elder brother and those of the father could not be more polarized. The elder brother called or summoned (“pros-kaleo”) the young boy to stand before him and demanded an explanation for the celebration. In contrast, the father entreated the elder son to stand beside him to hopefully see the father’s point of view regarding the matter. Rather than chastise the elder brother, the father called him into a partnership (“parakaleo”) rather than marginalize him before those in attendance.<sup>202</sup> The elder son’s insult towards the father was more acute than that of the younger son, due to the public nature of the humiliation in the context of such a grand occasion.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Bailey, 81.

<sup>199</sup> Bailey, 81.

<sup>200</sup> Bailey, 82.

<sup>201</sup> Bailey, 83.

<sup>202</sup> Bailey, 83.

<sup>203</sup> Bailey, 84.

“But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’”<sup>204</sup>

As if the public shame was not enough, the elder son withheld a customary term of respect when addressing his father. The phrase “O father” was both an essential and expected term of respect when addressing one’s father. In his anger, the elder son further publically humiliated his father through his omission of this title and through his elevated tone.<sup>205</sup> Pride exuded from this son when he spoke of never breaking the law, yet in reality he, like his younger brother, had broken his father’s heart. Surely this intimates an essential truth that Jesus was conveying to the self-righteous Pharisees. To further accentuate his righteous past, the elder son seems to embellish the waywardness of his “father’s son,” not his very own brother. Again, the Pharisees, hearing the parable, failed to see the nature and heart of God for their very own people as brothers and sisters.

The parable speaks nothing of the elder brother receiving any detailed account of his younger brother’s behavior, yet he concluded that prostitutes were involved. He had yet to remove the plank from his own eye and instead sought to point out the speck in his brother’s eye.<sup>206</sup> Like the Pharisees, the elder brother failed to realize that the plank and the speck of sawdust came from the very same tree.

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<sup>204</sup> Luke 15:29-30.

<sup>205</sup> Bailey, 84.

<sup>206</sup> Matthew 7:3.

## Luke 15:31-32

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”<sup>207</sup>

As an antithesis to the elder son’s reaction, the father began his reply with an endearing statement of respect. Overlooking the omission of a title, overlooking the bitterness, the lack of gratitude, the distortion of facts and the accusation of favoritism, the father selected a keen word when addressing the elder son: he opened his reply with the word “teknon,” not an ordinary word for “son.” “Teknon” indicates a deep love and affection, meaning “my dear son.”<sup>208</sup> Mary used this very same word to address Jesus when she found him after their separation.<sup>209</sup> Other than making sure the elder brother understood that he still had a brother and that he should refer to him as such, the father continued to rejoice. The father’s joy was unquenchable, even in light of the older son’s poor attitude and negative reflection on the family.

One should rejoice over the return of one in a hundred sheep and certainly over finding the last of ten lost coins, but more than anything, the return of one’s own child is worthy of indescribable joy. This is the heart of a father, thus the heart of Jesus, though not yet the heart of Jesus’ Pharisaical listeners.

### **Theology: A Christian Ethical Strategy**

Reaching today’s sexually active collegiate with the gospel requires a ministry model of evangelization that takes into consideration the postmodern values that drive

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<sup>207</sup> Luke 15:31-32.

<sup>208</sup> Bailey, 86.

<sup>209</sup> Luke 2:48.

this generation but also one that leads them into the biblical truth that can free them both from sexual immorality and for sexual purity (progressive stepping stones along a continuum). Beyond the obvious commission to make disciples of every people group, there is also the need to remedy the rampant spread of “porneia” among today’s postmodern students.

Not unlike the academic philosophers in first-century Athens or the sexually immoral citizens of Corinth, today’s American society has been and is now under a spell. The preached words of C.S. Lewis in 1942 are every bit as applicable, if not more so, in this century as they were in his.

Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies...bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere.<sup>210</sup>

Many people today have settled for far less than is available to them. Something must break the spell of that which seduces and induces them. The introduction or reintroduction of the gospel, the very power of God,<sup>211</sup> into culture is what can awaken those who have been seduced by “evil enchantments.” Modern culture has become far too satisfied with that which is far too below what is freely available to all those who are in Christ.

The parallels between the “enchantments” over first-century Athens and Corinth as well as college students in this era are many. An analysis of the Apostle Paul’s first-century evangelistic strategy at Areopagus and his reaction to the sexual immorality in

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<sup>210</sup> Lewis.

<sup>211</sup> Romans 1:16.



Corinth provide a biblical foundation for devising an evangelistic strategy to reach twenty-first-century college students who are unabashedly sexually active. Such an ethical strategy accentuates the process of *informing*, *inspiring* and *including* this subculture in the process of cultivating an experiential knowledge of the *incarnate* Christ.

### **Informing College Students on the Issue of Christ and Sexuality**

To reiterate a point, Paul emphasized the importance of seeing the human body as sacred. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”<sup>212</sup> In part, the Corinthians lacked sufficient knowledge to hinder the “leaven” of their unethical sexual behavior. They needed the impartation of information from a credible, authoritative source that cared for their well-being. Today, the church must take note of where “unchurched” post-moderns are and acknowledge a biblical illiteracy. College students can learn how to understand the Bible and make personal decisions regarding its veracity with just a little informed direction. Ministries today should not assume that their audiences know scripture, know how to understand it or validate its divine authority. The church has been correct in accentuating the reading of scripture but relatively absent when it comes to showing young people how to practice simple contextual hermeneutics.

The gospel must be taught by those who possess it and those who are possessed by it. The gospel must engage “thinkers” The fearless and relevant witness...must engage the opinion-makers and shapers of thought and “do battle with contemporary non-Christian philosophies and ideologies and philosophies in a way which resonates with thoughtful, modern men and women, and so at least gain a hearing for the gospel by the reasonableness of its presentation.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

<sup>213</sup> Stott, 281.

While in Athens, Paul recognized the curiosity of some to know more on the subject of the gospel. The Athenians wanted to hear and learn of Paul's "foreign religion." "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"<sup>214</sup> "You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean."<sup>215</sup> Some listeners later requested another opportunity to hear more on the subject. Paul even commented to the Council that in the past, God had overlooked such ignorance but that now was the time for people everywhere to repent.<sup>216</sup>

Postmodern college students have been raised amid the "information age." Students today are accustomed to having most any question answered in literally tenths of a second via the internet. Inherent to being in college is an appetite for knowledge, if for no other reason than to prepare for advancement within a culture that places a high premium on "knowing."

Areopagus-type councils still convene today in the form of professors who influence the body of knowledge available to post-moderns, often leaving gaps in understanding concerning many vital aspects of life. Students today deserve informative, caring, critical thinkers who can answer questions that today's secular professors cannot or will not answer concerning the relationship between science and scripture. Students deserve an accurate, biblically oriented explanation regarding sexual behavior and its effect on one's physiology, neurochemical make up, relationships, future, spiritual life and psychology.

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<sup>214</sup> Acts 17:19.

<sup>215</sup> Acts 17:19-20.

<sup>216</sup> Acts 17:30.

In a secular society, students may not always make an immediate connection between sexual promiscuity and the consequences resulting from such ongoing behavior. Perhaps students long for a safe, trustworthy source of information about the multiplicity of consequences and feelings they may experience due to their “porneia” that are beyond their immediate understanding or control.

Not only do today’s college students need information pertinent to their spiritual status, but they need it communicated to them via a means that is relevant, retainable and beyond rhetoric alone. This culture needs trustworthy information concerning its members’ inner, felt needs. Students may well be exposed to knowledge in their classrooms, but it is the wisdom rooted in the fear of the Lord that they also need.<sup>217</sup> Not every professor is equipped to impart such wisdom.

In society, many questions remain unanswered for this generation. Surely students are aware of their culture’s ongoing influence on sex being seen as a measurement of one’s acceptability and value. Students would benefit from receiving answers regarding the short and long term effects of spending between 5 and 20 hours per week being exposed to pornography, including its effects on one’s personality, physiology and future relationships. Students need an understanding of why they persist in a behavior that is eroding their self-worth in the name of “love.” Yes, the postmodern college student deserves and likely desires pertinent knowledge regarding the gospel of Christ as it interacts with life, meaning, purpose and even one’s sexuality.

Like the Athenians, students have set aside years of their lives to simply learn. “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but

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<sup>217</sup> Proverbs 1:7.

talking about and listening to the latest ideas.”<sup>218</sup> Today’s evangelist must not conclude that every secular philosophy in the mind of a student is fully solidified, any more than the evangelist should assume that every component of the gospel has been fully understood or rejected. There is a very good reason why a college student’s worldview is in a state of flux. Like the Athenians, their intellectual life is characterized by uncertainty, turmoil and lack of progress, so that their hunger for and fascination with the new can be very strong.<sup>219</sup>

### **Inspiring College Students Toward an Identity in Christ**

Amid all the negative commentary surrounding the sexual promiscuity of this culture, there is in fact some good news, as well. College students want romance. Like anyone, they want to be inspired. “Sexiness is no longer about being arousing or alluring, it’s about being worthwhile....”<sup>220</sup> The motivation for the “hook up” culture is to be accepted through their sexual behavior but only in a limited way. Male students use sexual behavior as a means to gain the acceptance of other males. Conversely, young women on average use sexuality as a means of gaining acceptance from their sex partner.<sup>221</sup> This is good news because students do not see or experience a strong connection between sex and romance. This “friends-with-benefits” perspective is superficial, primarily physical and lacks depth.

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<sup>218</sup> Acts 17: 32.

<sup>219</sup> “Proclaiming Gospel Integrity,” Bible Gateway, January 2010, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Proclaiming-Gospel-Integrity>.

<sup>220</sup> Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America’s College Campuses* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008), 14.

<sup>221</sup> Freitas, 29.

When asked to describe their most romantic experience, rarely did students mention sex. Most described things like long conversations or walks. Students long for a deeper spiritual connection found more within them rather than through physical engagement with another.<sup>222</sup> Students seemingly can be “wooded” not by a physical relationship but by a metaphysical relationship to be established with a personal God who loves and pursues them.

Students need and deserve “truth-infused-inspiration.” Perhaps in today’s culture there are “poets, songwriters, heroes and heroines,” as there were in the first century, who can and do inspire those who long for inspiration. Jesus claimed to be truth.<sup>223</sup> Christ is in culture; therefore truth is in culture as well. Students can find truth in this culture that they can relate to. Christians who care can impart truth and inspire students via a plethora of artistic sources, including songs, poems, film, plays and art.

Students want to be romanced and inspired but not with sexual immorality. There is a time to accentuate the negative and rehearse the consequences of sexual promiscuity, but there is also a time to accentuate the beauty of human sexuality as experienced in the context of sexual purity-holiness.<sup>224</sup> There is beauty in sexual holiness. Sexuality, when seen as a beautiful gift, is an appropriate and effective source of love and affirmation. God is personal, and human sexuality in his ordained context should be personal, fulfilling and romantic. “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a

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<sup>222</sup> Freitas, 41.

<sup>223</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>224</sup> Stott, 94.

gazelle that browse among the lilies. You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you.”<sup>225</sup>

Man-made definitions of spirituality, as well as the worship of idols, leaves post-moderns, not unlike the first-century Athenians or Corinthians, longing for more. Today’s cultural preoccupation with sexual promiscuity is an indication that humankind is longing for something. The sheer number of temples in the first century was an indication that people were searching. Temples were actually constructed to “unknown gods” as a means of covering one’s spiritual bases. The hope is that college students, in the context of the gospel, will eventually realize that their sexual behavior is not an effective way of securing intimacy, romance or a healthy identity.

### **The Relationship of Church and Society**

Those born after 1984 constitute the current generation known as “Millennials.” Relatively speaking, with very few exceptions, all college students are Millennials, but not all Millennials are college students. This segment of society provides church leaders and sociologists valuable information concerning the opinions of those soon to be in college, those in college and those who maintained typical Millennial values post college. The Barna Institute has conducted over 200 studies and 27,140 interviews over the past decade among Millennials. The results of the Barna Studies reflect some very positive results concerning Millennials who faithfully attend a church.<sup>226</sup> There are also responses in interviews that reflect a shifting pattern in the opposite direction that are consistent with other writings on the subject. “Many students resist the rules, definitions,

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<sup>225</sup> Song of Solomon 4:1, 5, 7.

<sup>226</sup> “5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church”, *Barna Group*, January 2010, accessed August 8, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church>.

organization, and simple requirements that being ‘religious’ entails—even those who identify as religious themselves. Culture’s thought on religion ... we’ve messed up so many times—gotten it wrong so many times, why try? Students are tired of religion (denominations, arguments, differences in opinion), but look for ‘spirituality.’ ”<sup>227</sup> “For most, ‘spiritual but not religious’ indicates little more than a distaste for organized religion and a vague interest in something more—what, they are not sure.”<sup>228</sup>

Fifty-nine percent of students who grew up going to church either end up walking away from their faith or from the church as an institution at some point in their first decade of adult life.<sup>229</sup> The Barna Group queried those who walk away from church, “the institution,” about what helps their faith to grow, and their most common responses were prayer, family and friends, the Bible, having children and their relationship with Jesus.<sup>230</sup> The church did not make the list. The number of students who simply did not attend church throughout childhood has increased in the last decade, from 44% to 52%, mirroring a larger cultural trend away from churchgoing among the nation’s population.<sup>231</sup>

“The church has an image problem.”<sup>232</sup> Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, coauthors of *Unchristian*, highlight the perspectives of those “outside” the church looking in. These researchers see “outsiders” having concluded that Christians are “hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political and

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<sup>227</sup> Freitas, 41.

<sup>228</sup> Freitas, 21.

<sup>229</sup> Barna.

<sup>230</sup> Barna.

<sup>231</sup> Barna.

<sup>232</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 11.

judgmental.”<sup>233</sup> While the approach of some ministries may be less than well thought-out and loving, there is an inherent offensiveness to the gospel which is nothing new. The Apostle Paul wrote on this subject, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”<sup>234</sup> “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall...”<sup>235</sup> Along the same lines, the Apostle John met the very same resistance not because of the style of the gospel presentation but because of the gospel itself. Jesus phrased it like this: “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.”<sup>236</sup>

Millennials are looking for answers to questions that deserve solid biblical responses as they think and rethink priorities in life, in love and in their futures. Ultimately, college students want to understand themselves, life and matters of a spiritual nature. “[T]here are college students all across America, the majority of them women, who are eager to not only talk about sex, relationships, religion, and spirituality as individual subjects, but also what they might have to say to one another.”<sup>237</sup> Christians ultimately have what this generation is looking for in life; the question is how that is best imparted. Millennials are craving the depth of insight concerning life and meaning that the church is uniquely poised to provide. “Furthermore, many young Americans say life seems complicated—that it is hard to know how to live with the onslaught of information, worldviews and options they are faced with every day. One of the specific criticisms

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<sup>233</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, 29-30.

<sup>234</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18.

<sup>235</sup> Romans 9:33.

<sup>236</sup> 1 John 3:13.

<sup>237</sup> Freitas, 12.



young adults frequently make about Christianity is that it does not offer deep, thoughtful or challenging answers to life in a complex culture.”<sup>238</sup>

In this context of searching and longing for answers, a closer analysis of a postmodern worldview and what feeds its influence will only further clarify an effective evangelistic strategy to lead students to a newly found and experienced freedom in Christ.

### **Postmodernism**

Nowhere will one find a concise, pointed definition of postmodern philosophy, nor should one expect to do so. Any philosophy that denies surety and absolutes would by nature remain loose and relative in definition. No true and concise definition of a philosophy without absolutes should exist. A true and clear definition violates the postmodern mindset. However, postmodernism is at its root an overreaction to a failed Enlightenment project. Mankind now lives and moves and has his cultural mindset far from where it used to be. The philosophical pendulum has swung back to the other extreme.

The Enlightenment demanded a single, universal rationality for the investigation of the world, including a proper “reading” of nature. Modernity insisted that there was only one way of seeing things. There was only one way of viewing the world, determined by universal and “omniscient” human reason. Those who took their stand on particularities such as the notion of divine revelation were excoriated as “irrational” and charged with the scandal of particularity.<sup>239</sup> The Enlightenment Modernity era was

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<sup>238</sup> Barna.

<sup>239</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 90.

centered on a rigid, totalitarian approach to reality.<sup>240</sup> Outwardly, however, when mankind saw the fall of the Bastille and the Berlin Wall, inwardly, something else crumbled – the concept of authority and absolutism.<sup>241</sup> In context, some of this change was certainly positive, yet to make universal, sweeping changes in the culture's perception of authority, power and truth, regardless of the specific context, can be damaging.

Those in authority lost their authority and credibility and that which was held as trustworthy became suspect. This loss permeated governments, disciplines of study and the Bible itself. Postmodernism dismantled the certainty of the Enlightenment project by abandoning the notion that there is one way to reading a text or seeing the world. Without a metanarrative society has individually defined purpose and meaning. Even the written word is read in a manner foreign from the past. There is no objective controlling reality outside the text that somehow shapes the text – or provides a means by which it can be interpreted. The identity and intentions of the author of a text are declared to be an irrelevance to its interpretation. It is the reader not the author that has the right to determine the meaning of a text. Postmodern writers argue for the legitimacy of multiple interpretations of a text. There remains no objective reality outside the text to control its interpretation therefore the text has no intrinsic meaning or an indeterminate meaning.<sup>242</sup>

If the Bible is neither inspired by God nor authoritative to humans, then those who communicate the opposite, “scandalous message” would lack credibility as well; thus, in a postmodern context, people tend to view organized religion as irrelevant. However, with the absence of this foundation, society is left to wrestle with the reality we all experience, albeit in diverse ways, absent of a divine metanarrative. Postmodernism is the Truman Show, a city without a church or synagogue and no thought concerning its absence.<sup>243</sup> The world is no longer monochrome but simply diverse, and this is to be

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<sup>240</sup> McGrath, 41.

<sup>241</sup> Charles Ringma, *Empowering the Church for First World Re-Evangelization* (lecture at, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, March 11, 2005).

<sup>242</sup> McGrath, 40.

<sup>243</sup> Ringma, lecture.

celebrated. Yet, when conflicting religious beliefs are placed in a “spiritual blender,” the result is a contradictory concoction void of its original form and intent. God has gotten blended with half-truths and heresy all in the name of tolerance. The now pluralistic society is groping for answers to questions within a plethora of differing religious beliefs and cannot find tested, reliable or direct answers. The postmodern holistic approach to life, while attractive at first glance, has given birth to an interconnectedness that adopts conflicting messages void of clarity and direction. Society now leans toward intuitiveness with no moral compass, in hopes that its intuitiveness will somehow match with rational thought, godly wisdom and hope. There is no wonder why this culture is looking for love in all the wrong places.

Postmodernism has left college students longing for a meaning and purpose that need to be clarified and actuated in their lives. Philosophy may be wonderful, but results are important too.

### **Bridging the Divide Between Postmodernism and Christ**

Postmodernism is propped up by the power of community. It is likely that most college students today did not set out to devise a philosophy to live by. However, the “oversexualized” culture that conditioned their minds to behave in certain ways does hold power, and the results are evident. An effective strategy to evangelize postmodern college students who are unabashedly sexually active must inform, inspire and include students in a new way of seeing and acting in culture, namely through the power of community as seen in the kingdom of God.

## **The Theology of God's Community**

If the internalization of the gospel is vital to an incremental cessation of sexual promiscuity and the avoidance of its consequences, then there should be empirical evidence to support such a reality. The sexual behavior of non-married eighteen to twenty-three year olds who remain in a spiritual community is vastly different from the behavior of those who have no devotion to a religious community. The greater one's spiritual commitment, the fewer the consequences the person experiences from sexual activity outside of marriage. Dr. Christian Smith, author of *Souls in Transition*, studied the results of the third wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) in order to better understand eighteen to twenty-three year olds and their behavior. Smith's anecdotal and scientific study yielded interesting and encouraging results.<sup>244</sup>

Non-married college students, as opposed to non-married people of the same age who do not attend college, are statistically less engaged in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, that can lead to poor judgment concerning sexual behavior.<sup>245</sup> There are significant statistical differences between students who remain in a community of faith and those who do not, as well. Even when controlling for sex and gender in each group sampled, spiritually devoted non-married students engage less in pornographic viewing, oral sex, cohabitation and sexual intercourse.<sup>246</sup> An interesting point must be made to further clarify the relationship between spiritual devotedness and sexual behavior. The (NSYR) provided results from both students attending secular and non-secular universities, where spirituality can be more or less prevalent from institution to institution.

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<sup>244</sup> Smith, 14.

<sup>245</sup> Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 265.

<sup>246</sup> Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, 271-275.

In learning communities that were more spiritually homogenous, an even greater synergistic mindset existed concerning sexual behavior. “While student curiosity about religion and, most of all, spirituality is piqued, high levels of interest in religion and spirituality seem to have no effect on reining in or shifting the pressures of hookup culture at spiritual colleges—again distinguishing them from evangelical colleges, where religious commitment *does* translate into a culture of sexual restraint.”<sup>247</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude that until the “hook up” culture, consisting of those most engaged in sexually promiscuous behavior, shifts its allegiance from its present communities to healthier, spiritual communities, the sexual behavior of those within the “hook up” culture will remain unlikely to change. “To create a community where faith matters not just in theory but in reality, faith has to be a public value, not just a private one.”<sup>248</sup> When evangelical schools are contrasted with secular universities, clearly evangelical schools make faith public rather than private and are best at integrating faith and culture.<sup>249</sup> The point here is not that suddenly all colleges should become evangelical in nature, in some sort of “Constantinian” manner. However, there is a significant difference between the prevalence of sexual promiscuity among evangelical and secular college communities that is the result of students experiencing the power of community in both positive and negative ways. “When it comes to religion and spirituality, most campuses seem to be failing miserably, barely attempting (if at all) to create atmospheres where students feel welcome to pursue their ‘big questions’ in this area and in whatever form their desires

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<sup>247</sup> Freitas, 15.

<sup>248</sup> Freitas, 71.

<sup>249</sup> Freitas, 67.

(and their professor-mentors) take them. This oversight has even bigger repercussions when it comes to sex....”<sup>250</sup>

Staying in a spiritual community is important. Those who stay engaged in a spiritual community like the church have more often than not experienced the influence of adult mentors, have had the opportunity to serve the community and mentor others as a means of growing in community.<sup>251</sup> A highly functional church yields highly functioning college students, but overall, society is experiencing a significant decline in meaningful relationships. Ben Ortrip, author of *The Coming Loneliness Epidemic*, an article summarizing the results of a twenty-year study conducted by Duke University and the University of Arizona, highlights the trends in culture that reflect a huge decline in meaningful relationships in culture.<sup>252</sup> The consistent divorce rate, increasing rates of fatherlessness and the transitory nature of culture, coupled with the influx of technology and social media, is yielding a generation with fewer and fewer meaningful personal relationships. The study “The Coming Loneliness Epidemic” compared data from 1985 and 2004 and found that the mean number of people with whom Americans can discuss matters important to them dropped by nearly one-third in two decades.<sup>253</sup> In a distorted manner, many college students are seeking authenticity in relationships through sexual behavior. The strong, innate desire for relationship, coupled with the potentially even stronger desire for physical touch and gratification is yielding an incredible sense of alienation that is inevitably a result of human sin.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Freitas, 71.

<sup>251</sup> Barna.

<sup>252</sup> Ben Ortrip, “The Coming Loneliness Epidemic,” *Catalyst Groupzine: The Culture Issue*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson Impact, 2006), 128.

<sup>253</sup> Barna.

<sup>254</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 73.

Without mentors and confidants in the context of a spiritual community and without opportunities for college students to mentor others, the likelihood exists for fewer college students to be devoted to working out their faith in a church community. Students who are devoted to their faith in the context of a church engage less in sexually promiscuous activities.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, to stem the tide of promiscuous sexual behavior and the accompanying consequences, students need the gospel presented to them in a manner that not only accentuates community but also compels them to be a part of that very community, so they can experience a spiritual transformation that leads to sexual wholeness and holiness.

Students want and need community. The gospel is not simply an invitation to community, but an invitation into God's community. It is this God in community who is to be proclaimed. The shifting of one's allegiance from a destructive community to a community of faith in Christ can lead students to sexual wholeness and holiness. It is the proclamation of the Trinity and its definition of quintessential community that matters. "Because God is the social Trinity, a plurality in unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community. God intends that we reflect his nature in our lives. This is only possible, however, as we move out of our isolation and into relationships with others. The ethical life, therefore, is the life-in-relationship, or the life-in-community."<sup>256</sup>

The implications for students hearing, receiving and assimilating the power of the gospel as community into their lives are many. Students are called into community with the Trinity to experience the wholeness of a divine family not always modeled in earthly

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<sup>255</sup> Freitas, 67.

<sup>256</sup> Grenz, 76.

families. A relationship with the Trinity offers a deeper experience of fatherhood, sonship and daughterhood, and a model for perfect love and communication without masks. The Trinity is quintessential sharing, selflessness, respect, and love even to the point of jealousy. “Genuine love, therefore, is positively jealous. It is protective, for the true lover seeks to maintain, even defend, the love relationship whenever it is threatened by disruption, destruction, or outside intrusion. Whenever another seeks to injure or undermine the love relationship, he or she experiences love’s jealousy, which we call ‘wrath.’ When this dimension is lacking, love degenerates into mere sentimentality.”<sup>257</sup>

The Trinity is mysterious and unlike any earthly metaphor, thus worthy of reverence and awe. The Trinity is a model of lasting, deeply committed relationships in a world increasingly fragmented and temporary. Students can see and experience unity and uniqueness simultaneously in the Trinity. The Godhead offers a postmodern world the interdependence and interconnectedness desired in culture, while meeting the need for authenticity in relationships. The Trinity is a model of intimacy, as one desires to know and be fully known. All the needs of individuals and of community are met in the Trinity. God in community prior to creation loved, received love and celebrated that love. It is that fellowship that culture desires, since culture was made in the image of God.<sup>258</sup> When properly presented as the Trinity, God can no longer be perceived as totalitarian, oppressive or dictatorial. God is love. Further, love requires an object. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and the Spirit is the expression of that mutually respectful, never-ending love. To understand the eternal implications of the Father’s love for the Son is to also embrace the Father’s love for humankind, in that he sent his only

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<sup>257</sup> Grenz, 73.

<sup>258</sup> Genesis 1:26.



begotten to die as atonement for humankind's sin. "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world."<sup>259</sup> The Triune God offers a vibrant community of love, over and against the myth of postmodern individualism.

### **Inviting College Students into Community**

The very Trinity that created the heavens and the earth also created man. The "Us" created man in the image of the "Us."<sup>260</sup> The Triune God thought that all that had been created was good, with the exception of one thing. Man was alone. Man, though he had been invited into relationship with the Trinity was without human fellowship. To this day, it remains essential that each person created in the image of God be in fellowship with the Triune God, while enjoying fellowship with others who are also rooted in Christ. Jesus summed up the entirety of the law with an emphasis on loving the Father and loving others.<sup>261</sup>

God demonstrates his desired for community as his redemptive will dictates a desire for all to be saved and to be in fellowship with him and one another.<sup>262</sup> The missional, biblical, Triune God brought Egyptians out of Egypt to accompany the Israelites.<sup>263</sup> Ruth, also a foreigner, came out of Moab,<sup>264</sup> and Rahab came out from

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<sup>259</sup> 1 John 4:12-14.

<sup>260</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>261</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>262</sup> 2 Peter 3:9.

<sup>263</sup> Exodus 12:38.

<sup>264</sup> Ruth 1:16-18.

Canaan<sup>265</sup> to fellowship with the Israelites. Yahweh was instrumental in bringing Gentiles into the kingdom far before any New Testament controversy on the subject. Yahweh not only delivered each of these people from false gods, but he also placed them in the bloodline of Christ.<sup>266</sup> God is the missionary who draws all peoples into fellowship with him and his own. The pinnacle of that missionary thrust was embodied in the life and ministry of the incarnate Christ, but even more so through the church, his witness on earth. To understand Yahweh in greater fullness, one must expand and deepen the now generic use of the word “God.” Saying “God” in today’s culture is to take the uniqueness of the Trinity and highly dilute its meaning. “The implications of a monad god are totalitarianism, authoritarianism, machismo.”<sup>267</sup> The Trinity, in an extraordinary manner, has always beckoned all of mankind to come and enjoy the eternal celebration in community, in love and in a dynamic life giving way.

Many college students today have not yet been exposed to a kingdom-minded gospel that effectively calls them out of their darkness. When one understands and experiences God as a person in community, one will differentiate him from other gods and idols. “An authentic Trinitarian community is irresistible to the world.”<sup>268</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity is the central dogma of Christian theology, the fundamental grammar of our knowledge of God. Because the doctrine of the Trinity gives expression to the fact that God has opened himself to us in such a way as we may know him in the inner relations of his Divine Being, we have communion with him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Joshua 6:22.

<sup>266</sup> Matthew 1:1-17.

<sup>267</sup> Ringma, lecture.

<sup>268</sup> Ringma, lecture.

<sup>269</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 1.

The seemingly irresistible sexual pursuits in culture may well reveal a longing for authenticity and acceptance, though being pursued in the wrong relational context. To embrace the Trinitarian nature of God is to extinguish the rampant selfishness of today's culture that is so evident in consumerism and the over-sexualization of culture. In many ways, destructive behaviors like that, though rooted in selfishness, also reveal the deep desire people have for fulfilling relationships.<sup>270</sup>

Instead of a kingdom-minded gospel, many have determined the church to be “nominalistic.” Post-moderns see the church as carrying out tradition in memory of Christ without significant personal dynamics or significantly transformative power. Post-moderns see Christendom at the expense of the kingdom of God. They see Christendom as more exclusive, where the kingdom is inclusive. Christendom is here for those within her; the kingdom is for those both inside and out. Christendom is more church-centered at the expense of kingdom-mindedness. A personal message of salvation can undermine the gospel of the kingdom, where Christians are called to be a community of priests with divine purpose and anointing. A kingdom-minded gospel strategy has a “go” movement that encompasses everyone everywhere: it reaches beyond the individual and impacts the family, the immediate community, the city, the region and society.<sup>271</sup> A strategy to effectively evangelize college students must be a strategy that does not inspire the students to include “God” in their spirituality but rather to see how God desires to include them in his community of faith. Students are not to be invited into a “Christendom” that exists for its own well-being but are invited to participate in the purposeful building of his kingdom in the here and now so as to effect the hereafter. In a kingdom community,

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<sup>270</sup> Ringma, lecture.

<sup>271</sup> Ringma, lecture.

people are loved and valued as they experience a sense of belonging and mission. God has a mission, *missio Dei*, being fully carried out in such a community.

Mission (may be understood) as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put into the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit (is) expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world...mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world: the church is viewed as an instrument of that mission...there is church because there is a mission, not vice versa.<sup>272</sup>

It is the Father’s purpose in Christ to seek and save the lost.<sup>273</sup> Going with the gospel towards postmodern college students who are steeped in sexual promiscuity will be fruitful if the evangelistic approach is based on a biblical framework. The Apostle Paul’s first-century evangelistic efforts at Areopagus and his teachings on sexual immorality provide such a sound biblical framework for evangelism in the twenty-first century. The Trinity, along with Christ’s emphasis on the kingdom, bring yet fuller form to the framework within which the church may be fruitful in its invitation to Millennials into a twenty-first-century community of faith.

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<sup>272</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 20.

<sup>273</sup> Luke 19:10.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

After an introduction to the pervasive problem and setting for this project, followed by an identification of the theological framework for a potential solution, this study now moves to a review of the literature that both informs and provides direction for the thesis-project to follow. Various authors, professors and scientific studies have provided valuable perspectives and research crucial to devising an evangelistic strategy for collegiate students to hear and receive Christ and experience sexual freedom.

#### **Quantifying Sexual Immorality Among College Students**

Before this thesis-project could take shape, it was essential to quantify the prevalence of sexual promiscuity among college students. One cannot simply assume that many college students are sexually promiscuous. Additionally, one should not assume that the tangible and intangible consequences of sexual promiscuity are either minimal in nature or catastrophic in scope. The scope of this project would depend upon sound, dependable, historical research concerning the sexual behaviors of college students.

Dr. Christian Smith, Professor of Sociology at Notre Dame, provided such trustworthy research in his two books, *Lost in Transition* and *Souls in Transition*.<sup>1</sup> These works became a focal point of preliminary research that greatly assisted in defining the problem and setting for this thesis-project. In the studies Smith conducted, he at first

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Christian, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011). And Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009).

interviewed young middle school students to ascertain their initial sexual behaviors and the subsequent trends concerning their sexual behaviors as they proceeded into adulthood. Smith's data provided this thesis-project with clear data regarding those students' sexual practices and their escalation throughout the teen years and into the college years. Smith's interviews surveyed a more than adequate cross section of the population, alleviating any potential geographical bias or trends that could skew the data.

It is clear, through Smith's research, that sexual promiscuity is a rampant issue among emerging adults.<sup>2</sup> The consequences of the escalation of sexual activity over time are equally clear.<sup>3</sup> Smith's extensive research provides evidence that substantiates the claim that many young people today are adversely affected by sexual immorality. Smith's research paints a bleak trend in culture that is pervasive, but not to be overgeneralized, among college students.

Smith provided objectivity where cultural relativity and subjectivity usually rule. The consequences of sexual immorality in culture are undeniable and worthy of addressing. The data regarding sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted sex and unwanted pregnancies, as well as the tremendous amounts of emotional and relational baggage among college students are clear and measurable.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, for a portion of culture that denies the authority of the Bible and its treatise concerning sexual immorality, sound evidence exists that quantifies the dangerousness of sexual promiscuity and an abundance of regret among emerging adults.<sup>5</sup> Where biblical rhetoric ends in the minds of the postmodern, real life results continue to speak in agreement with Scripture. Smith's

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, 148.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 151.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, 159.

research and approach to this subject provided this project with a clear and intense motivation to approach this subject in a humble and sober manner, for there are both physical and spiritual matters at stake for many. Without such substantiated research, this thesis-project would be based only on anecdotal evidence and casual observations regarding the prevalence of sexual immorality as defined in the Bible.

### **Emphasizing the Need for Meaningful Strategic Relationships**

For many today, sexual promiscuity outside of a committed marriage takes place over a much more extended period of years, unlike in previous generations. Marriages today are not taking place until ages 28 and beyond.<sup>6</sup> The basic need for meaningful relationships continues throughout this period of maturation. Among the sexually active, often meaningful relationships are defined as sexual. An effective evangelistic strategy aimed at reaching college students who are unabashedly sexually active must on some level address a new convert's need for meaningful human relationships in addition to a new relationship with the Father through Christ. The Barna Group's research in the effectiveness of the church in influencing young people up through age 28 was eye opening.

The results of Barna's nearly 200 studies of 27,140 students reveals a great deal concerning the effectiveness of the church among teens and college students. Two main criteria in a student's life are essential to their spiritual growth through and beyond college: students need two main meaningful relationships with others, one being a mentor and the other being someone to mentor. The success of any evangelistic strategy is

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<sup>6</sup> "Millennials", *Barna Group*, January 2010, accessed December 10, 2015, [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials).

dependent upon the ongoing investment of a more seasoned individual in the life of the student, while recognizing the need for that student to invest in another person. Barna research also highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and instruction concerning how to discern any non-biblical cultural agenda as well as a practical means by which to facilitate the student's daily walk with Christ. Students need help understanding the Bible and interacting with another person regarding life and spiritual questions. Students who come to Christ and remain in relationship with him have a need for both information and inspiration. At the root of sexual promiscuity may well be the human need for understanding and being understood by another person.

### **Meeting the Needs of a Self-Defined Spiritualized Culture**

Dr. Donna Freitas, author of *Sex and the Soul*,<sup>7</sup> has also taught at Boston University in the Department of Religion, at Hofstra University in their Honor's College and at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont. *Sex and the Soul* became a focal point for a large portion this thesis-project because of Freitas' unique approach to dealing with the over-abundance of sexual immorality on campuses with the help of students themselves.<sup>8</sup> Freitas, when teaching at St. Michael's college, taught a class on dating that consisted of 20 females and 1 male. Students were collectively inspired to discover a new perspective on the "hook up" culture and more importantly a plan to deal with it as a community of like-minded people.<sup>9</sup> It is just such a mobilization of community that facilitates a change of one's personal perspective. In other words, change can take place when Millennials themselves decide to influence their peers. Freitas' students began to

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<sup>7</sup> Freitas.

<sup>8</sup> Freitas, xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Freitas, preface.



work extra hours outside of class to publish an on campus newspaper, *Dateline SMC*, to specifically address the “hook up” culture.<sup>10</sup> The seemingly immediate action plan that the students devised speaks to the power of community and resolve within this troubled culture. A successful evangelistic strategy may well need to incorporate such student involvement and passionate buy in.

Freitas’ *Sex and the Soul* also accentuates another important paradigm in the quest to reach this culture with the gospel. It is clear in her writing that there exists in this culture a desire to be both informed and inspired.<sup>11</sup> Students want to make an integrative connection between sexual behavior, spirituality and emotional wholeness. According to Freitas, students want these key areas of life to have a dialogue among themselves.<sup>12</sup> Students are looking for a clear understanding of why they think and feel the way they do as it pertains to sexual activity with others or even with images, as in the case of pornography.<sup>13</sup> The indication of a desire among students to better understand themselves as individuals rather than as pawns moved about by strong peer behavior was a refreshing indication that there remains in this culture an appetite for a true encounter with Christ himself though there exists dominant feelings of anger toward organized religion.<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, students are greatly influenced by the sexually-charged culture that informs, instructs and inspires them towards sexual immorality. There is a great power in community, be it negative or positive. Freitas substantiates this claim by quantifying the various levels of sexual immorality on different college campuses. Of the campuses that are deemed to be Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical Protestant in nature, there are

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<sup>10</sup> Freitas, xix.

<sup>11</sup> Freitas, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Freitas, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Freitas, 278.

<sup>14</sup> Freitas, 36.

varying levels of faith commitment and sexual immorality. Catholic universities have a higher prevalence of sexual immorality among students than Protestant.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Catholic universities have a lower prevalence of sexual promiscuity than public schools.<sup>16</sup> Where the spirituality or faith of a student body is meant to be public, sexual immorality is lowest.<sup>17</sup> Where a student's spirituality is relegated and expected to be a private matter, sexual immorality is the highest.<sup>18</sup> Students want a spirituality that is theirs and definitely not religious. "For most, 'spiritual but not religious' indicates little more than a distaste for organized religion and a vague interest in something more—what, they are not sure."<sup>19</sup> The "critical mass" of the church and her influence on students varies by the nature and origin of the church. The higher the ritualistic qualities of a church, the less influence the church has on sexual behavior.<sup>20</sup> The less relational emphasis that is placed on the Word of God and its author, the less impact the church has on leading students into a deeper faith and biblical sexual wholeness and freedom.<sup>21</sup> The sexual immorality on campuses today is in part due to the irresponsibility of churches to make a disciple who understands biblical stewardship of one's sexuality. As a result, students, by way of their own surveys and interviews, are appearing content outwardly but inwardly are far from being content.

Many sexually active college students today are cultivating a self-defined, privatized "spirituality" as a means to connect with greater depth, meaning and purpose in life apart from their sexual behavior. Students seemingly place their sexual exploits in

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<sup>15</sup> Freitas, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Freitas, 159.

<sup>17</sup> Freitas, 156.

<sup>18</sup> Freitas, 156.

<sup>19</sup> Freitas, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Freitas, 156.

<sup>21</sup> Freitas, 36.

a self-defined “silo” so as not to affect their spiritual well-being when the interaction between their spirituality and sexuality would be inconvenient. Students in the “hook up” culture are seemingly hooking up to make meaningful connections with someone apart from themselves and apart from a well-defined acknowledgement of God-ordained sexual boundaries. Freitas’ book *Sex and the Soul* was an enlightening read informing this thesis-project of the good news regarding sexual immorality. Students are desperate for relational connection, intimacy and a sense of belonging, and these are good needs to want to have met. Freitas puts it this way, “Sexiness is no longer about being arousing or alluring, it’s about being worthwhile....”<sup>22</sup> Students, particularly females, seemingly reluctantly give themselves away sexually because there does not seem to exist an alternate way of securing commitment from a male. Females want commitment and are willing to rationalize or spiritualize the means to pursue that commitment even through sexual promiscuity. This phenomenon, though devastating to one’s soul, is a wonderful indication of how to meet inward needs through Christ, as opposed to the outward behaviors that are leaving women deeply longing for real freedom.

The absence of peers that are passionately seeking to be good stewards of their sexuality in Christ is leaving those without an activated faith frustrated and hurt. Freitas spells out through personal interviews with students and a student led newspaper that sexuality on campuses today is leaving students to self-create their spirituality.<sup>23</sup> This spirituality rationalizes their sexual exploits and leaves them with some satisfaction that they are trying to connect with a god that can help them makes sense of the world and

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<sup>22</sup> Freitas, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Freitas, 264.

seems to be calling the shots for them.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the culture is making expectations of the sexually promiscuous student, yet the spirituality that the students are creating as a result is deeply founded on the freedom to make one's own decisions concerning spiritual matters.<sup>25</sup> The parents of current college students who mandated public church attendance, worship and activities apart from a passionate relationship with Christ have produced a generation of students who want to make their own private decisions concerning spiritual matters; for the most part, these decisions lead them far from Christ. The sexual exploits on campuses today draw great attention to a student's desire for intimacy, belonging, commitment and love within the context of a spirituality that provides such realities, but many students are experiencing these very things as only momentary, immoral counterfeits.

### **Providing the Power of Community Within a Kingdom Mindset**

Each generation's felt needs are likely different from the previous generations', and sweeping generalizations can be costly. Developing understanding and empathy specifically toward those of the Millennial Generation is key for pursuing the goal of this study: determining how best to reach them with the gospel.

Twenty-six lectures by two professors at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia served as worthy sources for the writing of this thesis-project.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Darrell Johnson and Dr. Charles Ringma teach a course entitled "Empowering the Church for First World Re-Evangelization," as a means to empower their students to be adequately

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<sup>24</sup> Freitas, 44-45.

<sup>25</sup> Freitas, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Ringma, *Empowering the Church for First World Re-Evangelization* (lecture at, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, March 11, 2005).

prepared to share the gospel with this generation. Their vast pastoral and global missionary experiences provide for an enriching object of study. The fact that the course is taught in metropolitan Vancouver, a city with relatively few Christians, is a pertinent backdrop when seeking to understand the resistance or ambivalence that exists in culture concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. The spiritual barrenness of Vancouver as depicted by the illustrations within the lectures provided a stark reminder that various areas of the world are more open to the gospel and that each region can have specific spiritual nuances to deal with when sharing the gospel.

The Regent College course material informed this project in a few key ways. Ultimately, regardless of what generation is trying to be impacted for the Kingdom, God himself is the missionary who is much more concerned with a person's salvation than any ministry or individual could ever be. Secondly, people apart from Christ, whether they know it or not, are interested in the inclusiveness of the Kingdom over a perceived exclusivity of Christendom. The Kingdom in its fullness is irresistible.<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, people apart from Christ long for community. In every sense, "God" is often misunderstood as a seemingly dictatorial solo entity, as opposed to a communally minded Trinity. It is the invitation and the inclusiveness of the Trinity that Millennials long to genuinely experience. Even sexual promiscuity, as attractive as it may first seem, is no match for truly being relationally connected into God's community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is in this relationship that we can seek to truly know God and be truly known by him. The lectures provided a description of the many needs that collegiates long to have met. In the Trinity are faithfulness, fatherhood, integrity, intimacy, understanding, unity, love,

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<sup>27</sup> Ringma, lecture.

joy and celebration. The biblical and communal God is available, but not yet adequately demonstrated or encountered by Millennials.

A careful analysis of college students' need for close community became an integral part of the evangelistic strategy to be tested in this thesis-project. The lectures of Johnson and Ringma collaborated as an additional source of research, an entire systematic theology constructed with the theology of community in mind.

Whereas most systematic theology texts allude to the importance of community within the Trinity and certainly within the church, *Theology for the Community of God*, by Stanley Grenz, consistently accentuates the element of community throughout all aspects of theology.<sup>28</sup> Grenz, Johnson and Ringma seemingly have their hands on the pulse of culture and people's insatiable desire for love and community, both with and in God, and with and in culture. Millennials have expressed in many ways, through numerous studies, that they long for a meaningful, relational connection. Like everyone else, they want to feel loved and valued and experience a deep sense of belonging. Perhaps the seemingly insatiable longing for finding one's identity through sex is a reaction to the absence of the divine community found in Christ. The quantification of this need will serve as a major step in the validation this thesis-project.

### **Postmodern Priorities**

The research for this project included the study and participation in a conference on the life and ministry of C.S. Lewis at St. Aldate's Church in Oxford, England,<sup>29</sup> as

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<sup>28</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Uncovering the Life of Lewis* 2. Lecture, Mere Apologetics: The Life & Legacy of C. S. Lewis, The Queen's College, Oxford England, July 4, 2013.

well as an interview with Dr. Alister McGrath concerning postmodernism, critical realism, and reaching Millennials with the gospel. McGrath's book, entitled *The Science of God*, provided a clear and succinct understanding of postmodernism and its flaws as a philosophy in the twenty-first century. Additional speakers at the Lewis conference, such as Dr. Ravi Zacharias and Dr. John Lennox, also provided an informational backdrop to this thesis-project that only validated McGrath's lectures. McGrath accentuates the need to connect with this culture in a manner similar to how C.S. Lewis connected with his culture. McGrath's references to Lewis' sermon entitled "The Weight of Glory" did influence this thesis-project. McGrath elaborates on Lewis' insight regarding a trance that comes upon a culture, "This trance blinds society to God but the spell is broken by the power of the gospel."<sup>30</sup> Lewis' culture, not unlike this present generation, settled for far less than was actually at its disposal in terms of experiencing the gospel as the power of God. McGrath highlighted the need for visuals and story to accompany the gospel message today. McGrath's assessment of this current culture as feeling and intuitive verses rational and objective is helpful for understanding how to invite them into a relationship with Christ. Still void of true romance, the people of today's sexually charged culture are likely longing to be truly swept off their feet with an unexpected, non-predictable gospel of love and inclusivity. Each source for this research project concurred with the need for a demonstration of realism and authenticity when it comes to making God's Kingdom known to the lost.

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<sup>30</sup> McGrath, Lecture.

## Identifying a Biblical Blueprint for an Evangelistic Strategy

In a project such as this, there are inevitably some areas of research more appetizing than others. The statistical data regarding sexual promiscuity among children and young adults is not uplifting. Yet discovering the depths of the riches of the solutions to such poor sexual stewardship can be exhilarating. The solution(s) to the current culture's sexual crisis are present in the scripture. The problems and challenges of today are not new or unique. "There is nothing new under the sun,"<sup>31</sup> and "God is the same yesterday, today and forever more."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, exploring first-century biblical writings can and does provide a divine, "time-tested" approach to dealing with the human dilemmas of the twenty-first century.

The decision regarding where in Scripture to focus was not difficult. Paul's speech on the Areopagus to a spiritually confused, secular audience in Athens provided some foundational truths about communicating spiritual matters to both academics and people with a "spiritual appetite."

Davis Ballast's Dallas Theological Seminary thesis, entitled *Contextualizing the Gospel: Comparing Paul's Methods in Athens and Corinth*,<sup>33</sup> provided valuable insight for this project into the context of Paul's ministry in both Athens and Corinth. The discovery of Paul's desire to connect with his audience as a credible herald while not compromising his message was enlightening. Ballast's work, coupled with the Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Acts 17, primed the pump for creative thinking regarding an evangelistic strategy that would utilize secular music to connect with people

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<sup>31</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9.

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>33</sup> Ballast, David. 2003. *Contextualizing the Gospel: Comparing Paul's Methods in Athens and Corinth*." Master's Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary.



through their need to identify with the truth, as Paul used secular poetry to connect with the Athenians.<sup>34</sup>

Ballast's research fits hand and glove with that of Dr. Ben Witherington III, who is currently the Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and serves on the doctoral faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Witherington's book, entitled *Conflict and Community in Corinth*,<sup>35</sup> provides an excellent contextual perspective into the mindset of Corinth and its culture. These two works underpin the biblical framework of this thesis-project because they reveal the contextualized expectations of Paul as a herald of Christ, while equally revealing the perspectives of the secular mindset and of an immature church in a sexually charged, yet "spiritual" metropolis. These books provided a preliminary look at the context wherein spirituality and sexuality co-exist without a second thought. The Corinthians and the new Corinthian Christians failed to make the connection between sexual sin and unhealthy spirituality. In fact, at the time, one might easily have argued that the sexuality of the day only fostered a greater spiritual experience. Corinthians grossly integrated sexual immorality into their worship. Witherington's detailed description of the spiritual context of Corinth also provided insight regarding the spiritual climate and expectations of society today. Ballast provided an interesting perspective concerning Paul's evangelism in Athens that preceded Paul's corrective teaching in Corinth. Thus, these writings by Ballast and Witherington helped to construct the core biblical framework for an evangelistic strategy for reaching a sexually promiscuous collegiate. Additionally, the

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 18.

blatant sexual immorality in the city of Corinth and in the church provides an excellent model of study for dealing with sexual immorality and spirituality.

### **Closing Reflections Concerning Literature and Scripture**

Many authors can write books or blogs or provide lectures on how to best share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, many writings, studies and lectures are invaluable to this study. Yet any evangelistic strategy must ultimately incorporate the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The Spirit is in no way limited to the ability of the evangelist, the strategic nature of a presentation or the state of depravity of those being reached. As Paul utilized a specific approach in Athens, he utilized a very different approach to those in Rome. Christians are to be prepared in season and out and are to minister in love as they share the gospel with others.<sup>36</sup> Neither the culture nor the church can afford to overcomplicate evangelism. Simply put, people need to hear the truth. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”<sup>37</sup>

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God. It does not precipitate the power of God.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, any evangelistic strategy to reach sexually promiscuous college students cannot be void of the Word of God, which is ultimately the hammer that breaks the rock.<sup>39</sup> It is the inspired and anointed Word that ultimately makes the difference. “As

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<sup>36</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2.

<sup>37</sup> Romans 10:14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>39</sup> Jeremiah 23:29.

the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”<sup>40</sup>

The literature read and reviewed for this thesis-project provides clarity concerning the mindset of collegiate students. Yet clarity is no replacement for the inspired Word. There must not be a perceived synchronicity between the church and culture, where the church has little to no distinctiveness from culture. In attempts to be relevant, the church can ill afford to discard what is most relevant, namely the Scripture. Conversely, a caring church with really good news that meets the needs of an audience seeking sex for answers is a strategy that frees college students from sexual immorality and frees them to sexual purity in Christ.

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<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 55:10-11.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PROJECT DESIGN AND OUTCOMES**

#### **Overall Goals and Objectives**

The primary purpose of this research project is to discover new and effective ways of evangelizing sexually active, non-Christian college students. This project seeks to discover answers to three central questions. What aspect of the gospel informs and inspires this contingent of students on an intellectual, emotional and/or spiritual level? What content, when shared with this target group, increases their openness to the gospel of Christ? What insight can be acquired that may better equip ministers, ministries, and lay people to be even more fruitful in leading this often troubled component of society to an experiential understanding of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

This research project involved soliciting subjective, personal, and sensitive information from college students in an anonymous and confidential manner. The analysis of the students' comments created a fertile ground from which one might develop a more fruitful and strategic means of evangelizing the members of this subculture.

#### **Project Methodology**

##### **Overview**

As a tool for gathering responses to the research questions listed above, the project included an online survey for college students. An online survey has the advantage of querying large numbers of respondents, while anonymously soliciting responses on highly personal and sensitive topics. In addition, the online aspect of this

project afforded the researcher the opportunity to interact with college students using the convenient platform of online video content, a medium with which students are already comfortable.

### Research Participants

The accessibility of an online survey afforded a greater likelihood of a large sample group, dividable into Christians and non-Christians. For that reason, students throughout the United States and at specific university campuses were able to receive the survey invitation. The promotion of the survey throughout the United States occurred via Facebook. Small promotional cards and flyers were also visible on the campuses of Western Carolina University and Southwestern Community College in Cullowhee, North Carolina, as well as on the campus of Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina. The random selection of a participant to win a \$500.00 Amazon gift card provided an incentive for completing the online survey. All survey participants provided informed consent, due to the sexual nature of some of the questions. Two hundred and sixty surveys were completed and analyzed. Participation in the survey was contingent upon being an active student between the ages of 18 and 22 years of age.

The thesis-project that follows evaluates the responses of a sample group, who share certain behaviors with the aforementioned national samples. While commonalities exist between the two, one should not conclude that the sample group for this research aligns perfectly with national results. Readers should avoid generalizing to the overall culture the conclusions that this researcher draws from the data that follow. For comparison's sake, readers should note that the majority of participants in this study attend public universities in the South. Further investigation may reveal that the sexual

behavior among college students throughout the United States is similar. The reader should also note that the receptivity of students to the gospel message might vary in various region of the country as well.

#### Research Instrument: Online Survey

Survey Monkey hosts the online survey, entitled *Students Sexuality and Spirituality Survey*, and the survey questions and video content remain accessible at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.<sup>1</sup> Survey Monkey's services also solicited involvement in the survey via their online marketing resources. The researcher developed the questionnaire in consultation with Dr. Bryan Auday, a Social Scientist in the Department of Psychology, Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts. The participants understood the survey to be a project of a doctoral student seeking answers to questions both personal and sensitive in nature. Before taking the survey, all students received the following instructions:

This questionnaire is designed to briefly explore your attitudes and behaviors regarding previous sexual experiences. In addition, there will be a few questions about spirituality and any religious beliefs you hold. Lastly, you will be asked to view four very brief videos on various topics. Please be assured that all of your responses will be anonymous. Do not type your name anywhere on the survey. In addition, the information will be kept strictly confidential. Any information you provide will be grouped with data from other participants to ensure anonymity. This questionnaire will take approximately 17 minutes to complete. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study. (Appendix A)

To obtain measureable, before and after survey results, with the end goal of ascertaining effective ways to evangelize sexually active college students, the survey consisted of three stages. First, the participants completed 20 preliminary demographic questions. Next, they viewed four short videos. To complete the survey, an additional 14 post-viewing questions helped to gauge the impact of the video material upon the participants.

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<sup>1</sup> To access video, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.

## Preliminary Demographic Questions

The twenty preliminary questions were instrumental in understanding the demographic of participants. Answers to these preliminary questions provided information regarding age, gender, academic status, sexual history, and sexual orientation as well as one's initial and ongoing exposure to pornographic material. The questions also prompted the students to respond to questions connecting the participant's sexual activity and level of anxiety and/or depression. Further, the answers to the pre-video questions revealed each participant's religious affiliation, if any, and the student's level of devotedness, if any, to that religious or non-religious ideology. The initial set of preliminary questions also established each respondent's self-declared openness to discussing matters of faith (Appendix A). Following the preliminary demographic questions, the students moved on to reviewing each of four videos.

## Video Content

Video #1: "The Return of the Prodigal," 4 minutes and 39 seconds<sup>2</sup>

*The Return of the Prodigal* is an artistic masterpiece completed by Rembrandt in 1669. This beautiful painting provides a moving visual depiction of Jesus' parable of the "Lost Son" found in Luke 15:11-32.

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<sup>2</sup> To access video, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.



This painting and “The Return of the Prodigal” video provide a non-Christian viewer with a beautiful picture of the compassionate, patient, unconditional love of a heavenly Father. This loving Father celebrates the return of his prodigal son, who is full of regret and shame after squandering his inheritance, in part, through sexual promiscuity. Rembrandt portrays the prodigal with his ear to the breast of his father. In “The Return of the Prodigal” video, that nearness to the heart of the Father is called “coming home.”

The resentful, non-celebratory elder brother represents the judgmental and conditional love of the Jewish leaders with whom Jesus shared the parable. The video draws a stark contrast between the shame of the returning prodigal and the arrogance of the elder brother. The elder brother had lived his entire life in the house of his father and on the property of his father, but he had yet to discover, as his prodigal brother had, what it means to be “home at the heart of the father.”

The intent of this video is to provide a non-Christian a visual depiction of “coming home to the heart of the Father,” where there is healing for shame. The video additionally presents the biblical Father as compassionate, patient, and gracious. This video also provides the viewer with an opportunity to relate on some level with the



prodigal and his “lovableness” or value in the eyes of God, despite a very real and present shame.

Video 2: “Depression and Faith,” 3 minutes and 34 seconds<sup>3</sup>

This second of four videos highlights the reality of the prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation among college students. Due to the correlation between sexual promiscuity and depression,<sup>4</sup> the video content was intentionally included in the online survey to solicit responses from participants regarding their emotional well-being and their openness to the gospel of Christ.

In general, emotional challenges are common among students. Over 18% of male college students and over 22% of female college students have experienced feelings of hopelessness in the last 12 months.<sup>5</sup> Depression on college campuses is also an ongoing issue. Twenty-eight percent of male students and 35% of female students report having had difficulty functioning at some point within a 12-month period because of depression.<sup>6</sup> Over 7% of male students and over 8% of female students have seriously considered suicide within the most recent 12-month period.<sup>7</sup>

The “Depression and Faith” video depicts Christ as one who was not unaffected by trials, betrayal, deep sorrow, and grief. Viewers observe an aspect of the personhood of Christ that makes him easier to relate to, understand, and experience. They see Christ as a “man of sorrows acquainted with grief,”<sup>8</sup> as the video presents a biblical sketch of

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<sup>3</sup> To access video, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 17.

<sup>5</sup> American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2014. Hanover, MD: American College Health Association; 2014.

<sup>6</sup> American College Health Association.

<sup>7</sup> American College Health Association.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 53:3.

events from the life of Christ. Christ was no stranger to loss, lack, hunger, accusation, physical abuse, betrayal, or public humiliation.

Video 3: “Science, Logic and the Bible,” 3 minutes and 26 seconds<sup>9</sup>

College students often learn of scientific discoveries and advances that some people assume to be in direct contradiction to both the Old and New Testaments. This brief video attempts to close some of the perceived gaps that exist between true science and the truth of the Bible. True science is not a foe but a friend to the truth found in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

The intent of this video is to open the non-Christian viewer’s mind to at least consider the possibility that intelligent-design, science, logic, and sound arguments often validate the truthfulness and relevance of the Judeo-Christian scripture. This video also briefly addresses historic revivals, the problem of evil, the global witness of Christianity, and the martyrdom of the early church.

Video 4: “Sexuality and Spirituality,” 3 minutes and 47 seconds<sup>10</sup>

The video content entitled “Sexuality and Spirituality” makes a connection between one’s spiritual life and one’s sexuality in that God Himself actually created sexuality with an understanding of its purpose, immense beauty and the potential devastation sex can cause in a fallen world. The intent of the video is to highlight the close proximity that Christ had with people who were struggling with sexual promiscuity and His devotion to help them find a more satisfying relationship rooted in true nonsexual love and intimacy found in Him alone.

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<sup>9</sup> To access video, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.

<sup>10</sup> To access video, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/lifepoints>.

The video also explains the origin of the root word for pornography, porneia, and its meaning concerning the discounting or compromising of oneself through the ongoing exposure to sexual behavior and sexual idol worship.

### **Post-Viewing Questions**

After viewing all four videos, the study participants answered 14 post-viewing questions. The questions served as a means of quantifying the videos' effect on the students' openness to or curiosity about establishing a life-changing, faith-based relationship with Christ (Appendix A). The students' answers helped the researcher to ascertain how the video content informed and inspired students as well as provoked further thought in them regarding the subject matter. The post-viewing questions also helped the researcher discover any change in a participant's perceptions of God and the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Further, the students' answers quantified the relationship between one's sexual behavior and one's level of openness to the gospel. Students also responded to questions about the perceived benefits of hearing or engaging in discussions about the important relationship between sexuality and spirituality; they considered whether an increase in faith could help reduce or alleviate feelings of anxiety or depression or could increase one's emotional well-being.

After watching a video about the topic, the study participants answered questions regarding the relationship between the Bible on the one hand and sciences and logic on the other. Specific questions prompted the students to consider their level of personal identification with the story of the prodigal son and his compassionate Father, as depicted in the video highlighting Rembrandt's painting, *Return of the Prodigal*. Lastly, the survey

included a question asking students whether the video content had been effective in increasing their openness or curiosity in regards to establishing an intimate, meaningful, life-changing relationship with Christ.

### Defining the Target Group

Two hundred and sixty students participated in the study. All participants were active college students between the ages of 18 and 22. A vetting process was necessary to limit the field to respondents who were non-Christian, in keeping with the purpose of the research. The researcher established an initial criterion of defining a non-Christian participant as a student who self-identified as having either no religious affiliation or an affiliation other than Christianity. Additionally, the term “non-Christian” would refer to participants self-identifying as Protestant or Catholic but having little or no devotion to their faith (practicing little to no prayer or little to no reading of scripture). With that criterion in mind, the researcher was able to winnow down the original 260 responders to a target group of 91 non-Christian student participants.

Participants who self-identified as either Protestant or Catholic and answered the question below with “Somewhat,” “A little,” or “Not at all” qualified as members of the target group.

“To what degree are you devoted to your current religious faith?”

*Very much   Considerably   Somewhat   A little   Not at all*

Seventy-five percent of this sub-group of students also exemplified their non-devotedness by claiming little to no prayer life and little to no reading of the Bible. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the researcher categorized these students as non-devoted Christians.

### Diversity of Beliefs Within Target Group

Participants from the non-Christian, sexually active target group represent a diversity of religious beliefs, including the lack of religious belief. This target group consists of 32% non-devoted Christians and 68% who claim a non-Christian religious belief or identify themselves as either atheists or agnostic. Thus, for the purposes of this study, students who describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ and claim no affiliation with Christianity are part of the same sub-group as those who self-identify as atheists and agnostics. In terms of actually practicing a religion, 81% of the target group rarely if ever prays and 76.6% rarely reads any religious scripture. The following is a breakdown of the religious or non-religious ideology of the non-Christian, sexually active target group.

#### Figure 4.1 Current Religious Beliefs

Pre-Viewing Question #7: What best represents your current religious or spiritual beliefs?

a.	I have no religious affiliation, but consider myself spiritual	19%
b.	Atheists	11%
c.	Agnostics	21%
d.	Jewish	3%
e.	Islam	1%
f.	Buddhist	2%
g.	Other	11%
h.	Non-devoted Catholics	11%
i.	Non-devoted Protestants	21%

### Openness to Matters of Faith Within Target Group

Prior to viewing any of the videos, the participants quantified their personal level of openness to learning about or discussing matters of faith (Question 8). In fact, 83% of the participants stated that they were “very open” to “somewhat open” to learning or

discussing matters of faith and an astounding 95% were at least a “little interested” in an informative dialogue concerning matters of faith.

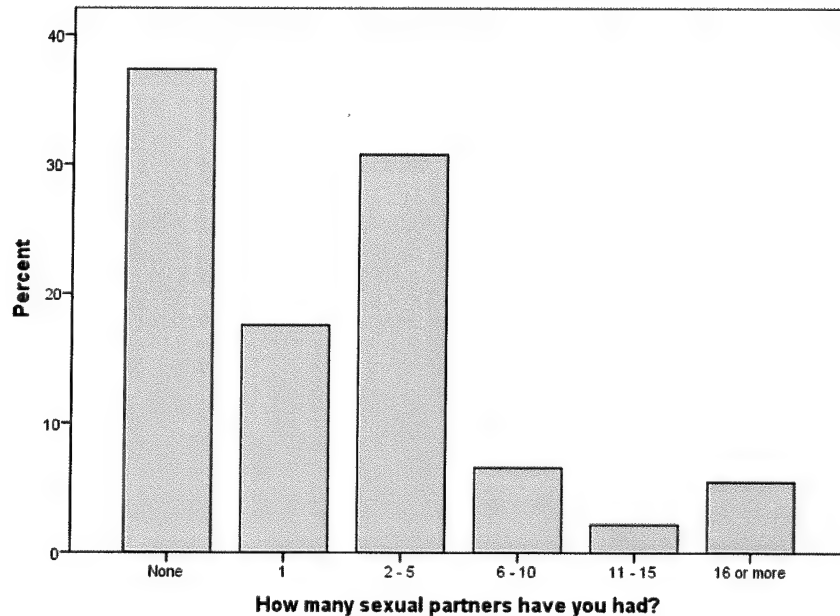
#### Target Group Sexual Orientation / History

Of the 91 students in the target group, 46% (42) are males and 54% (49) are females. Of the non-Christians participating in the study, 66 indicated that their sexual orientation is heterosexual; 9, homosexual; and 16, bisexual.

For the purposes of the researcher, the researcher then applied one additional and necessary criterion to the group of 91 non-Christian students. This final criterion, “sexually active,” narrowed the target group of 91 non-Christian students to a target group of 76, who define themselves as non-Christian and sexually active. For the purpose of this research, “sexually active participants” are individuals who have been or are currently sexually active with partners of the same and/or opposite sex or have not had sexual intercourse but report ongoing exposure to pornography (from less than one hour per week to twenty plus hours per week).

#### Figure 4.2 Number of Sexual Partners

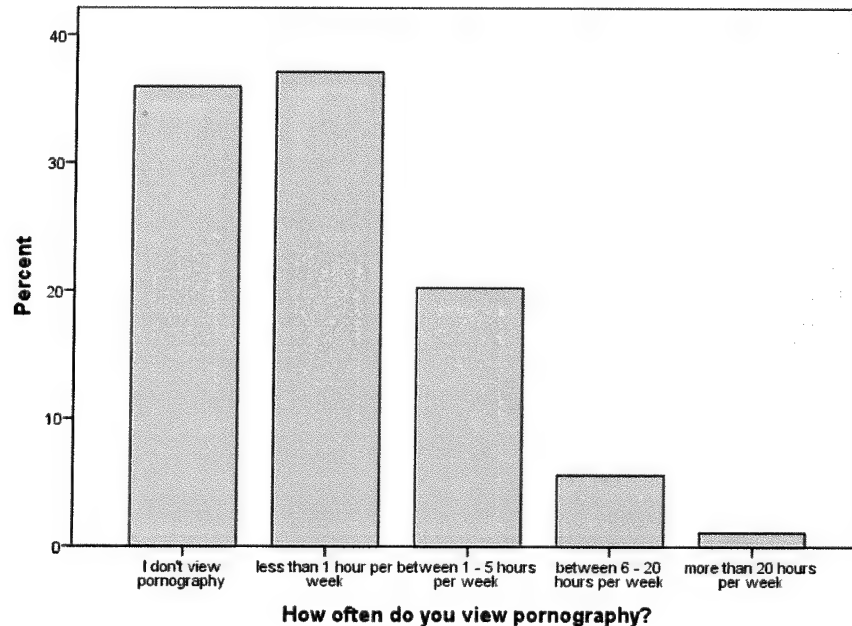
Pre-Viewing Question #5: How many sexual partners have you had?



One notable finding was that in the target group, 6% (5) of the students had their first exposure to pornographic material when they were younger than 8 years old; 24% (22) were between 9 and 12 years old; 35% (32), between 13 and 15; and 15% (14), between 16 and 17. As previously stated, consistent weekly exposure to pornographic material was a criterion for the “sexually active” category, though some within the target group reported themselves to be virgins. The researcher included such exposure to pornography as a criterion for the “sexually active” category because of the prolific exposure to pornography among non-Christian students.

### Figure 4.3 Pornographic Frequency

Pre-Viewing Question #16: How often do you view pornography?



The data reveals a highly statistically significant correlation between the frequency of one's exposure to pornography and the level of one's anxiety and depression. The higher the frequency of pornographic exposure, the higher the level of anxiety and depression (Pearson Correlation  $r = -.229$ ,  $p = .031$ ). The  $r$  value here is negative, in that the direction of the scale used for the question regarding anxiety and depression is reversed: a low number is identified with high levels of stress and anxiety.

The pre-video survey responses provided pertinent background information concerning the participants' faith or lack of faith and sketched out their sexual histories and behaviors. The information that the students provided prior to viewing the four videos determined the criteria for defining the non-Christian, sexually active target group and established a baseline from which to contrast the pre- and post-video responses. The



researcher designed the video content carefully to address the anticipated emotional and spiritual needs of the target group respectfully, while also addressing the important relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Additionally, in the videos, viewers see Christ as a caring and personal, relevant solution to a student's emotional and spiritual needs.

## **Results and Conclusions**

### **Post-Video Responses**

Analysis of the post-viewing data (questions 21-34 in the survey) is a means to potentially discover what was most effective in raising the level of openness and desire for the gospel of Christ within the target group, regardless of a student's current spiritual affiliation or lack thereof. The students' post-viewing answers indicate that Christians may need to change their approach to presenting the unchangeable gospel to the target group. Beyond the initial three post-video questions, there is an observable trend in the survey responses that indicates an alternative means of impacting college students with the gospel.

Three immediate post-video questions helped the researcher to measure the impact of the video content in terms of how the videos may or may not have informed and inspired the viewers or provoked a thought process within them. Perhaps among those serving in Christian ministries a misconception exists that the "sexually charged" college subculture is not open to the gospel. Yet, specific responses collected in this research project provide evidence to the contrary. As previously stated, an openness to spiritual matters was evident among the participants. Christians may also believe that

most college students today already possess a solidified understanding of the topics covered in the videos, yet there is statistical evidence to the contrary. Students appear to have inadequate information regarding the topics covered in the videos.

#### Informative / Thought Provoking Content

The non-Christian viewers in the survey lack a comprehensive understanding of the videos' topics. Respondents found the videos to be quite informative. In fact, 80.3% (73) of the students found the video content to be "very" to "somewhat informative." Thirty-one percent of females (15) found the content "very" informative, and 55% (27) found the content "somewhat" informative. Thirty percent of males (13) found the video content to be "very" informative, and 44% (18) found it "somewhat informative." From a sexual orientation standpoint, 85% (56) of heterosexuals, 55% (5) of homosexuals, and 75% (12) of bisexuals in the survey found the content to be "very" or "somewhat" informative.

Atheists, agnostics, and people of all the other spiritual backgrounds represented found the video content to be significantly thought provoking as well. Seventy-one percent of target group viewers found the video content to be "very" to "somewhat" thought provoking.

#### Inspirational Content

Beyond the matter of participants simply acquiring information, the students' post-viewing answers reveal that 61% (56) of them found the video content to be "very" to "somewhat" inspirational. There is also a statistically significant correlation between non-Christians who stated that their beliefs affect their personal decisions regarding sexuality and those who reported being inspired by the video content ( $r(66) = .321$ ,  $p$

= .009). There too is a significant statistical correlation between one perceiving the content as inspirational and one changing one's perception of God ( $r(66) = .274$ ,  $p = .026$ ). The correlation between those who stated that their beliefs affect their personal decisions regarding sexuality and those who perceive the Bible as relevant and in agreement with modern science is approaching statistical significance ( $r(66) = .208$ ,  $p = .094$ ). The video content appears to have stirred the minds and hearts of those not yet following Christ. While this discovery may be interesting, it is not yet a basis for defining a strategic means of evangelizing this segment of culture.

Continuing with a general overview, additional significant statistical findings indicate that the video content was impactful. The non-Christian study participants responded to this question: "To what extent do your beliefs affect your personal decisions regarding your sexuality?" Respondents whose current beliefs do affect their personal decisions regarding sexuality consistently answered that the overall video content did in fact affect them on multiple levels. Each of the following findings regarding the video content is highly statistically significant.

As noted in chapter 2 of this thesis-project, sexual promiscuity can have significant consequences, including emotional difficulties. In this study, those who indicated that their current beliefs affect their decisions regarding sexuality consistently see the benefit of engaging in or hearing discussions about faith as it relates to their emotional well-being ( $r(65) = .316$ ,  $p = .010$ ). This correlation is highly statistically significant. These same respondents also consistently see how a growing faith in Christ could alleviate or reduce ongoing feelings of anxiety and depression they may experience ( $r(66) = .420$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This again is highly statistically significant.

Those survey participants who follow their beliefs, whatever they may be, see themselves potentially benefitting from engaging in or hearing a discussion about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality ( $r(66) = .382$ ,  $p = .002$ , a statistically significant correlation). These same respondents understand that there is a relationship between one's sexual behavior and one's openness to the gospel ( $r(66) = .445$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Conversely, those who do not follow a prescribed set of beliefs in no way see themselves benefitting from learning about or discussing any relationship between spirituality and sexuality; nor do they see emotional or spiritual relevance in the video content. These generalities reveal a strong dichotomy between people who hold established beliefs and those who do not.

#### Significant Sub-Target Group Results

While there is much to learn from the overall survey results, certain observable data from one specific grouping of respondents are worthy of specific attention. One unique finding relates to the students' responses to the "Rembrandt" video (Question #33). Bisexuals, homosexuals, and heterosexuals alike responded at various levels of intensity to wanting to "personally experience coming home to the heart of the Father." The students who expressed this desire from "very much" to "considerably" to "somewhat" were the same students who found the video content to be "very inspirational" or "considerably inspirational."

Currently, there is not a prevalent expectation in the church that sexually active homosexual or bisexual students will be open to hearing the gospel or desirous to receive it, nor is there a reasonable expectation that sexually active atheists or agnostics will be

open to the gospel. Yet the data corresponding to survey question #33 indicates evidence to the contrary.

The video content had a notable, positive influence on 22 of the 91 students in the non-Christian target group as their responses to questions related to the “Return of the Prodigal” indicate. The survey responses from this specific sub-grouping of 22 students ultimately shaped the conclusions of this thesis-project. The responses among these 22 students were not unlike the select favorable responses from some of those who heard the apostle Paul at Areopagus.<sup>11</sup>

One particular question seemed to act as a litmus test for the effectiveness of the evangelistic content regarding the prodigal son’s return. Question #33 reads, “Did the Rembrandt video cause you to want to personally experience ‘coming home’ to the heart of the Father?” This question was included in the survey as a means of ascertaining a student’s desire for a potential relational, paternal and family oriented approach to God. Based on the video presentation, for a respondent to answer favorably to this particular question there too was also some personal identification with the prodigal’s emotional state.

Respondents who stated that their current beliefs affect their personal decisions regarding sexuality responded consistently that the “Prodigal” video influenced them to want to experience “coming home” to the heart of the Father ( $r(66) = .269, p = .029$ ). A statistically reliable openness also exists within this group, in that the video content was influential in increasing an “openness or curiosity to establish an intimate, meaningful life-changing relationship with Christ” ( $r(66) = .407, p = .001$ ).

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 17:32.

#### Figure 4.4 Rembrandt Video High Impact

Post-Question #33: Did the Rembrandt video cause you to want to personally experience “coming home” to the heart of the Father?

Students who answered “very much”:

# Sexual Partners	Beliefs	Hrs. Porn Weekly	Videos Inspiring	Sexual Orientation	Identify Prodigal	Open Gospel
0	Atheist	less than 1 hr.	Very	Bisexual	Considerably	Considerably
2 to 5	Other	0	Very	Hetero.	Some	Very

#### Figure 4.5 Rembrandt Video Considerable Impact

Post-Question #33: Did the Rembrandt video cause you to want to personally experience “coming home” to the heart of the Father?

Students who answered “considerably”:

# Sexual Partners	Beliefs	Hrs. Porn Weekly	Videos Inspiring	Sexual Orientation	Identify Prodigal	Open Gospel
2 to 5	Spiritual	6 to 20 hrs.	Considerably	Hetero.	Considerably	Somewhat
2 to 5	Spiritual	less than 1 hr.	Considerably	Homo.	Considerably	Somewhat
0	ND Prot.	1 to 5 hrs.	Very	Hetero.	Somewhat	Very
0	ND Cat.	1 to 5 hrs.	Considerably	Hetero.	Very	Somewhat
2 to 5	Spiritual	less than 1 hr.	Considerably	Hetero.	Considerably	Somewhat

#### Figure 4.6 Rembrandt Video Moderate Impact

Post-Question #33: Did the Rembrandt video cause you to want to personally experience “coming home” to the heart of the Father?

Students who answered “somewhat”:

# Sexual Partners	Beliefs	Hrs. Porn Weekly	Videos Inspiring	Sexual Orientation	Identify Prodigal	Open Gospel
1	Spiritual	20 or more hrs	Very	Hetero.	Somewhat	Somewhat
2 to 5	Jewish	1 to 5 hrs.	Considerably	Homo.	Somewhat	Somewhat
2 to 5	Other	less than 1 hr	Very	Hetero.	Little	Somewhat
1	Spiritual	1 to 5 hrs.	Very	Hetero.	No	No
1	Agnostic	less than 1 hr	Very	Hetero.	Little	Somewhat
0	ND Prot.	less than 1 hr	Very	Hetero.	Little	Somewhat
0	ND Prot.	1 to 5 hrs.	Very	Hetero.	Little	Considerably
1	ND Prot.	0	Very	Hetero.	Little	Considerably
0	ND Prot.	less than 1 hr	Considerably	Bisexual	Somewhat	Somewhat

The higher the intensity in which a student expressed the “desire to come home to the heart of the Father” (see video), the more the student expressed an equal intensity in identifying with the prodigal and being open to the gospel. This particular sub-group of respondents indicated that the video content was very informative, thought provoking, and inspirational. Those who “wanted to come home to the heart of the Father” also expressed an equal if not greater desire to hear or engage in discussions regarding the relationship between faith and their emotional well-being. These same 22 students also indicate that this “coming home” could have an impact on their level of anxiety and

depression. Over 71% (65) of this sexually active group of non-Christian participants described themselves as very much to somewhat interested in personally experiencing “coming home to the heart of the Father.”

The Rembrandt video portrayed the Father and his compassion, patience, and unconditional love. Also highlighted in the video was the sexually promiscuous prodigal, riddled with shame. It drew a sharp contrast between this prodigal and his elder brother. The responses from the students in the survey who expressed a strong desire to “come home” while also identifying with the regret and shame of the prodigal may reveal the manner in which evangelism should take place in this twenty-first century, postmodern setting. A potential shift in evangelistic methodology will be central to the conclusions that appear in chapter five of this thesis-project.

Conversely, in the opposite direction, a large contingent of students remained very closed to most if not all of video content. Those who indicated little to no desire to “personally experience coming home to the heart of the Father” were both informed and inspired by the video content yet remained resistant to identifying with the prodigal or expressing an openness to the gospel.

Participants having multiple partners or high levels of consistent pornographic exposure eventually appear to close down to the gospel or any willingness to engage in a discussion concerning spiritual matters. There appears to be a level of sexual promiscuity that seems to sequester one’s heart from the gospel. It appears as though additional research is needed to establish a more effective means to impacting such students with the gospel who have seemingly given themselves over to sexual behavior at the intensity of a sexual syndrome or addiction. Such responses seem to be similar to the divine



reaction to sexual perversion noted in first century Rome. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.<sup>12</sup>

Based on a statistical analysis of the post-video survey responses and on other observable trends in the data, several points will be worthy of elaboration in the conclusion of this thesis-project. The responses of those most impacted by the “Prodigal” video indicate that there may be a fresh and potentially more fruitful methodology for reaching sexually active college students with the gospel of Christ. The details of this potential shift in evangelistic approach will take shape in the conclusions of this thesis-project.

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 1:24-25.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analyzing the student survey responses can help the reader form some preliminary conclusions about evangelism among today's sexually active college students. The prolific nature of the target group's sexual behavior and the ramifications of that behavior serve in fact as excellent illustrations of the literature and other research that provide the content for chapters one and three of this thesis-project. A careful analysis of the survey responses suggests that many similarities exist between today's students and the Athenians and Corinthians of the Bible, in terms of the evangelistic methods that seem to connect most powerfully with their hearts and minds.

Within the context of the biblical framework that chapter two of this thesis-project details, certain conclusions are worthy of further investigation and practice, so as to reach more effectively today's sexually active, postmodern college students with the gospel of Christ. According to the findings of this study, a clearly definable theological "blind spot" exists in Western cultures that does not exist in Eastern cultures. It is this "blind spot" that may be keeping the Western church from reaching her evangelistic potential. The students participating in this study's online survey acknowledged their high level of openness to spiritual matters and their desire to hear more, feel more, and think more about spiritual and sexual issues. The research data suggests that the students most affected by the video content did not necessarily long for a gospel highlighting guilt and forgiveness but rather a restorative story that can help them overcome shame in their pursuit of honor. This longing was evident in the target-group students' responses to the *Return of the Prodigal* video.

Further, the findings of this study support the conclusion that those attempting to share the gospel with today's sexually active college students need a more comprehensive and potentially more effective method of evangelism than they have often learned; yet, in many respects, this better method has lately been inaccessible to college students and perhaps Western culture in general. This fuller version of the gospel presentation certainly deals with the identification of sin and the need for forgiveness, but it also accentuates the universal needs for healing from shame and for a biblically appropriate pursuit of honor. This chapter will emphasize the importance of clearly articulating this more complete gospel. The prevailing method of evangelism in the West, while biblical, may fail to fully entice sexually active students or meet their perceived personal needs. The Western church may need a clearer, theologically based vision of how to more effectively reach these students, who live day to day with a great need for redemption and restoration. In proposing a change in the way evangelism takes place within the target group, it is important that one's approach remain biblical. Change for change's sake that is not in keeping with scripture will surely be anything but fruitful.

### **A Theological Blind Spot**

Proper biblical hermeneutics require a reader to understand the author's original intent, in the context and culture in which the scripture was written. A limited view of a biblical text can potentially yield limited hermeneutical results. Some ministries in the West are operating with a diminished understanding and application of the gospel by neglecting the values of shame and honor that were central to the Ancient Near Eastern cultures in which the gospel was recorded. "Honor-shame dynamics are intrinsic to the

gospel, not just a lens we put on to make the gospel understandable to oral cultures.

When we read the Scripture's emphasis on honor and shame, we are taking our western [sic] lenses off to see what actually is there."<sup>1</sup> "We must see what is hidden in plain sight."<sup>2</sup> Further limiting the applicability and reach of the gospel, students today are increasingly conditioned by their culture to reject the prevailing Western approach to evangelism. Those participating in the online survey who claimed to be Protestant or Catholic but exhibited little to no devotedness to their faith (via prayer or reading of scripture) may well be a contingent of students who have not internalized a gospel that alleviates them of shame while pursuing their honor.

A primarily Western, propositional gospel seeks an acknowledgement of guilt before God and the need for innocence through forgiveness in Christ. This approach is completely aligned with truth but is at the same time incomplete. This more legal, propositional, and less relational approach was certainly more effective in generations past when there was a much clearer understanding of moral boundaries. Just sixty years ago, the Western cultures had much less ambiguity regarding what was considered moral or immoral because of a stronger cultural sentiment expressing approval or disapproval of behavior, sexual and otherwise. In this postmodern, relativistic culture, there is still the universal experience of guilt from sin, but it seems to get overshadowed by a cultural desensitization to the power of sin and its consequences. Therefore, the current sexually active generation of students is not as keenly aware of its transgressions. The "four

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Crouch, "The Return of Shame," Christianity Today, March 2015, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/march/andy-crouch-gospel-in-age-of-public-shame.html?share=x%20lpEZQh9pXCXW4zq4bE7lusVW9KGY0n>.

<sup>2</sup> Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale: Mission ONE, 2015), 80.

spiritual laws”<sup>3</sup> approach to evangelism, while certainly biblical, is not as effective today as it was in decades past. This more formulaic approach to reaching a pluralistic, tolerant generation is not yielding the evangelistic fruit that this generation needs in order to overcome the challenges of culture and sexual promiscuity. The postmodern culture still has rules, but rules and laws are not as motivational as relationships.<sup>4</sup> Students need more than a sense of forgiveness. Students need to hear a gospel that also informs them of an imminent restoration from the emotional ramifications of sin, sexual and otherwise, and connects them to an honorific community that affords them a sense of dignity. Students enmeshed in sexual promiscuity need an anecdotal gospel that highlights a Savior who not only forgives but who renders shame ineffective in their hearts and minds, while imparting to them a deep sense of their honor and value.

### **Shame vs. Guilt**

Shame asks: Who am I? Guilt asks: What have I done?<sup>5</sup> To go a step further, shame is a state of inner being influenced by community, and guilt is externally driven by behavior. In “shame cultures,” morality is governed by “external sanctions for good behavior, you know you are good or bad based on what your community says about you.”<sup>6</sup> In non-shame cultures, good or bad is determined by one’s “internalized conviction of sin” or how one feels about one’s behavior and choices.<sup>7</sup> As Western cultures more consistently identify sexual immorality as morally acceptable behavior,

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Bright. *Four Spiritual Laws*, Peachtree City, GA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Werner Mischke. Interview by Gary Hewins. On the phone. November 24, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Mischke, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), 223.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict, 223.

personally internalized guilt regarding sin diminishes. Therefore, a “guilt-to-innocence” based, propositional gospel is not meeting students at their perceived point of need. While culture is shaping students to have a greater tolerance for sexual promiscuity, students are in need of a transformational, healing gospel that alleviates the underlying, unavoidable sense of shame common to all humanity.

People of every generation and every culture are challenged with living in a fallen world. Inherent to living in a fallen world is the reality that people experience shame. Adam and Eve dealt with fear, shame, and the desire to hide from God as an immediate and direct result of their transgression. Before they had rebelled, they were naked and experienced no shame;<sup>8</sup> yet, after they sinned, shame was a painful motivator. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, dealing with shame has been part of the human condition. Evangelistic ministry in Western cultures, however, rarely addresses the issue.

The toxicity of shame in a sexually active college student’s life can vary, as can its effects. Some students experiment with casual and infrequent sex, while others suffer within the context of sexual addictions. Regardless of the intensity and frequency of one’s sexual experimentation, all people are in need of the Savior who dealt with our shame on our behalf. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>9</sup>

### **Nathanson’s Compass of Shame**

Dr. Donald Nathanson developed a means by which the effects of toxic shame can be understood and identified in human behavior. The toxic shame that students

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:25.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 12:20.

experience typically originates with one's parents, an unhealthy culture, or an unhealthy religion.<sup>10</sup> Nathanson's "Compass of Shame" accentuates four areas of dealing with toxic shame: Withdrawal, Attacking Others, Attacking Self, or Avoidance.<sup>11</sup>

Nathanson states that some Eastern cultures typically deal with one area of the Compass of Shame. People in East Asia primarily "Attack Self" as a means of managing toxic shame. Those in Western Asia and Mediterranean cultures commonly "Attack Others." Nathanson further elaborates that those in Western cultures typically experience shame in all four poles.<sup>12</sup>

Withdrawal is a common means of coping with shame. Isolating oneself and running and hiding began in the Garden of Eden and continues today. The life of a student does not typically provide frequent opportunities to discuss matters of sexuality and spirituality openly. When it comes to offering such opportunities, the church has seemingly done a poor job in the West, as have Western Christian parents. The survey that students took as part of this research project was likely a rare, safe, and welcoming opportunity to acknowledge issues related to sexuality and spirituality. The strong indication among students that the video content was informative and inspirational gives one pause to think about how little this subject is being addressed from an educational or spiritual perspective. Without the input of a counselor, teacher, or pastor, the entire topic of sexuality and spirituality may remain unaddressed, as is the shame; hence, students without faith often seek solace by themselves as they establish their self-ordained moral boundaries.

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<sup>10</sup> John A. Forrester, "Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel," in *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World*. (Scottsdale, AZ: Mischke, 2015.) 76.

<sup>11</sup> Mischke, 76-77.

<sup>12</sup> Mischke, 77.

Shame is a lingering sense of “less-than”-ness in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of the immediate community. Indicative of shame is the need to counteract it with honor. Surely shame leads to a frustration that is either directed outward at another or inward towards oneself. Either way, one wages an “attack” in hopes of alleviating the shame and gaining honor, but that result is never achieved, leaving one with a lingering sense of dissatisfaction. In this study’s survey, many students expressed a desire to hear or engage in more discussion about faith and emotional well-being, perhaps because of their general lack of opportunity to do so (withdrawal) and their need to process a lingering sense of shame.

Whereas withdrawal provides a temporary and ineffective means of managing shame, so too does avoidance. Students who engage in avoidance behaviors typically utilize denial, drugs, alcohol, or thrill-seeking as medicinal distraction.<sup>13</sup> In a sexually charged culture, the actual anesthetizing of oneself certainly lessens one’s inhibitions, thus creating a greater likelihood of sexual behavior. The high level of exposure to pornographic material, with some survey participants as many as 20+ hours a week, is likely a means to avoid dealing with shame, while at the same time feeding one’s shame-causing desires. Each of the four points on Nathanson’s Compass of Shame can continue seemingly indefinitely in a cyclical manner, where each point on the compass leads to more sexual promiscuity so as to achieve honor and value or escape the pain of shame.

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<sup>13</sup> Mischke, 76.



## **“New” Biblical Models of Evangelism**

### **Quest for Honor**

The Ancient Near East, the very place in which the Bible was written, was immersed in a quest for honor. Men sought to defend the honor and glory of Rome. They sought the personal honor of allegiance and devotion from others. Aristotle even remarked on this prevailing and expected sentiment of the day, writing: “...for honor is clearly the greatest of external goods...it is honor above all else which men claim and deserve.”<sup>14</sup> Pliny the Younger (c. 61-112), a lawyer, author, and magistrate, wrote: “Men differ in their views, but I deem that man happiest of all is he who enjoys the anticipation of good and abiding fame, and who, assured of posterity’s judgment, lives now in possession of the glory that he will then have.”<sup>15</sup>

The Ancient Near Eastern quest for honor was not exclusively secular. In the Old Testament scriptures, Yahweh told Abraham that he would make his name great.<sup>16</sup> When Jesus’ disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them, Jesus did not chastise them for seeking honor.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, Jesus had no issue with their desired end, just their means to that end. Christ simply clarified that the honor they longed for could be enjoyed on his terms by “being last of all and servant of all.”<sup>18</sup> Jesus addressed the issue of honor and glory again in the Gospel of John: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from only God?”<sup>19</sup> Jesus exemplified the means to enjoy honor and glory: by being servant of all.

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<sup>14</sup> Mischke, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Mischke, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 12:2.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 9:33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Mark 9:35.

<sup>19</sup> John 5:44.

Christ in no way sought to avoid eventual honor and glory. He asked his disciples to follow him to a place of tribute and honor for a job done selflessly and in keeping with the Father's commands. The culture in which the Bible was written was a culture desperately seeking honor and glory, and Jesus agreed with that pursuit yet disagreed with the popular means to attaining that status. The first century church sought honor; its surrounding culture understood that quest inherently. The twenty-first century church, on the other hand, downplays or even omits the pursuit of honor in the eyes of God and man. God enjoys glory and honor, and man is made in the image of God;<sup>20</sup> therefore, one's life is honorable when invested in God's kingdom. Jesus is in favor of the pursuit of honor, as he pursued honor for the Father, thus also obtaining it for himself. It may be difficult to see the connection at first, but perhaps at their core, sexual hubris and predatory behavior as a pursuit of honor and gender prowess reveal a real desire for community acceptance and divine honor. Indeed, human beings often pursue the right ends, yet negate the Christ-like means to those ends.

The Western church has a limited understanding of the quest and the longing for honor that is evident in the Scriptures. As a result of this deficiency, people today, longing for honor, feel as though it is wrong to do so, based on a limited scriptural exegesis. A gospel that resonates with an innate and biblical mandate to pursue honorific behavior as worship to God can fulfill us as selfish, depersonalizing, sexual immorality – though perhaps pursued for initially good reasons – could never do. A God-ordained pursuit of honor remains in the blind spot of the Western church, but the findings of this research show that it is alive and active in the hearts of twenty-first century college students.

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 1:26.

The survey participants who identified with the prodigal son in the Rembrandt painting may also have identified with the regained honor bestowed upon the undeserving son. The Father has a ring and a robe for those with an honor deficit. They too may resonate with the sense of “coming home to the heart of the Father” because of the deterioration of the Western family. Students long for the honor and tribute of those closest to them with hopes of a Father figure to comfort and welcome them home. A person’s sense of honor begins to develop within the context of family.

While students today do not pay tribute to Rome in a coliseum, they do seemingly thirst for a status of honor, wherever it can be found, even if they can only obtain it vicariously. What Division 1 college student does not understand football rankings? Football, like a religion, affords students and institutions an honorific status. A victory is not only for the team to enjoy. The extent to which football fans will become fanatical in their pursuit of honor is only rivaled by the extent to which fans do so in the college basketball season. Students seek honor, achieved and ascribed both through others’ and their own merits, be they academic, athletic, or sexual.

A gospel that alleviates shame and bestows honor is a gospel that resonates with sexually active students, as they proclaim an openness to hear and discuss Christ further. The gospel must be presented not just as cure for sin-guilt but also as the cure for sin-shame.<sup>21</sup> People can be healed if they look to Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Werner Mischke of Phoenix, AZ. Interview by author. Highlands, NC, November 24, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

The gospel message to sexually saturated students today must impart the honorific heart of God for a culture still seeking honor on its own accord. “And they said ...let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”<sup>23</sup> One of the primary reasons a student attends college, despite the expense and the potential indebtedness, is to posture oneself to receive honor and live a life worthy of tribute. The pursuit of a degree is already indicative of a pursuit of some form of honor. A relevant gospel message to this contingent of society should not dismiss the power of an invitation to live an honorific life in Christ.

#### Clean or Unclean?

Jesus confronted the status quo often times when no one else would do so or thought it possible or religiously permissible. Guilt resides in sexually active students, just as it does in every person outside sociopaths. However, based on their answers in the survey, some students are seemingly shut down to anything having to do with the gospel. Perhaps some of them, as the New Testament describes, have given themselves over to sexual sin to the extent that the only way to get them back is for God to give them over as well, in hopes of their later return as in the prodigal narrative. The Apostle Paul describes this extreme and saddening reality in his letter to Rome. “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Genesis 11:4.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 1:24-25.

For those who are presently reachable, guilt is a reality, as it is for everyone because of sin. Despite any claim that postmodern moral boundaries are simply relative, there is in people an inherent understanding of morality that one cannot fully escape even if it is buried beneath rebellion and hardness of heart.<sup>25</sup> There is a resident shame in students as there is in all people. Surely sexually promiscuous students are aware of the fact that consistent daily exposure to pornographic imagery is not honorific, worthy of tribute, or without the price of an abiding sense of shame. Such students are in need of a gospel whereby someone safe intervenes. Someone must seek to understand them when no one else seems to care. Someone must be willing to enter their world when others are seemingly too overwhelmed to do so. In principle, this method of sharing the gospel deals with a similar principle that the lepers and the woman with the issue of blood illustrate in the New Testament. Shame keeps people who need cleansing from feeling worthy of approaching others. Shame causes people in sexual sin to feel unclean. In fact, the current hook-up culture refers to an early morning return to one's dorm from a sexual encounter as a "walk of shame." Shame deters the sexually unclean from thinking they will ever be any different. Christ, however, is one who surrounded himself with the "unclean" so that they would be made clean. When lepers were not to be touched, Christ touched them and made them clean. When the woman with the issue of blood was prohibited from touching anyone, she touched the hem of the garment of Christ.<sup>26</sup> Christ is accessible to those who feel the least accessible and the most inhibited by shame. That shame is in part based on the collective sentiment of a group or community towards an individual, but the individual's perception of that group's opinion can be equally as influential as the

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 5:21-32.

group's actual opinion, should they differ. The safety of a confidential survey with private questions yields different answers and results than a similar survey would if the participants completed the questions as a group. It is in such moments of safety that vulnerability can come to the forefront. In a safe environment, people give themselves permission to experience a reprieve from shame and to be vulnerable rather than reticent. The down side of using a survey to measure openness to the gospel is that it takes time to build relationships of trust, which best enable one to get to the heart of private issues and experience another's genuine vulnerability. For this reason, evangelism among sexually active college students may require the building of trust in the absence of judgment for those who are very emotionally, physically, or spiritually self-ostracized. Occasionally students bear the shame of sexual abuse or the guilt of putting themselves in situations where unwanted sex was the result. Christ must be seen as one who can identify personally with them, even when others seem to want nothing to do with them. The failure of Western cultures to address shame to the extent that the Bible does so is a disservice to many people, who are looking for a way out of the shadows of shame and hoping to find freedom from the perception that honor is a virtual impossibility.

### Saving Face

The Western culture as a whole, inclusive of college students, is fixated upon image, appearance, comparisons, and "brand." The advent of social media has taken the approval or disapproval of being "liked" or not "liked," "followed" or "de-friended" to the level of a 24-hour, day-to-day experience. Teens not yet in college quickly grow to understand the acceptability game, not only on a school playground but for many hours both before and after school. One's level of public acceptance is actually "trackable" at

any given moment. Students are being followed, watched, and evaluated for worth of “liking or following” in a cyber world that seems able to value or devalue their personhood. This culture is enamored with the alleviation of shame and the acquisition of fame or instant celebrity through sporadic moments of online brilliance. The power of acceptance can be viral, just as shame can be a virus.

Social media is but one re-enforcer of the quest for honor and fame. In the college culture, sexual behavior can be a means of keeping face and presenting oneself as acceptable and desired. To gain “face” in culture is to have the favor of others. To lose “face” in culture is to be publicly shamed. Furthermore, people are reticent to seek the face of God when they themselves have lost “face” before themselves and others. In addition to emphasizing the gospel’s path from shame to honor in evangelizing postmodern college students, those doing the work of evangelism would do well to understand the dynamics of losing and gaining “face.” The concept of “face” is important in evangelism, for students can ill afford to hide their faces from God; they hunger to discover their ongoing value and honor, which they will see only in the face of God.

### **Conclusions**

When the Apostle Paul spoke with the court at Areopagus,<sup>27</sup> not everyone who participated in the discussion was willing to hear more about the foreign “Christ.” Some were appalled, while others wanted to hear more. When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.”<sup>28</sup> The results of this research are no different. Surely, some students reluctantly

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<sup>27</sup> Acts 17:16-34.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 17:32.

took the survey and sneered as they answered. Their responses may be informative on some level, but they are not the focus of the research. The ultimate goal of this work was to ascertain a more effective means of impacting postmodern college student who are unabashedly sexually active with the gospel of Christ. Some students were impacted in significant ways. As a rule, the students' participation in the study gave them new information, inspired them, and provoked them to thought. The fact that many noted finding the video content informative indicates their general lack of exposure to dialogue or teaching on the subject at hand. Apparently students are uninformed regarding the relationships between sexuality and spirituality, logic/science and the Bible, and emotions and faith in Christ. More instruction needs to take place on these important subjects, perhaps in the form of relational evangelism, workshops, or online communications.

The students were surprisingly open to discussing matters of faith. Whether this was due to a pluralistic mindset was not clear from the research findings, but even so, such openness sounds and looks good to an evangelistically minded church. While the "West" may no longer be Christian, it is still spiritually hungry.

Students who self-identified as homosexual or bisexual were open to the video content and inquisitive about the material on "wanting to personally come home to the heart of the Father." The researcher welcomed these results but had not expected them. Perhaps people seeking to evangelize should not hold any presumptions regarding the level of openness of any group of people. Perhaps, at times, evangelicals themselves are a hindrance to sharing the gospel, having formed pre-established biases against those who are perishing.



Students who self-identified as atheist, agnostic, or “spiritual,” but with no religious affiliation, were also far more engaged in the survey than the researcher had anticipated. Perhaps again there is a premature bias among Christians that is crucial to address.

It appears as though the safety of the confidential, online survey was an asset to soliciting answers that came from the students’ hearts. Participants had the freedom to answer questions with the expectation that no one other than the researcher would know their answers. The researcher only knows answers, but without a connection to a name. The significance of this freedom cannot be discounted, for it highlights the need for evangelism to be an informative, inspiring process more than an impersonal event. The fact that the video content was delivered in an online format seemed to work for many participants. Students are no doubt accustomed to acquiring information in that manner. Providing sensitive and personal information and inspiration to these emerging adults in additional online ways may further augment the process of evangelism among sexually active college students. At present, there does not appear to be many “offline” avenues for understanding shame and honor and sexuality and spirituality as it pertains to the gospel. Until a trust can be established between the students and the church, perhaps a greater deal of attention should be given to addressing the emotional and spiritual consequences of sexual promiscuity in an online format as an effective means to pre-evangelism.

The most significant conclusion one can draw from this project is that purely propositional and legal presentations of the gospel fall short when it comes to evangelizing today’s sexually active college students. Sexual immorality has escalated to

an alarming level because of the ongoing accessibility of pornography and the acceptability of sexual promiscuity. To a shame-ridden student, a formulaic, legal agreement called the gospel has as much relational intimacy as a one-night stand. There is an imminent need on today's college campuses for a fuller gospel presentation that accounts for the students' need to be freed from shame and to pursue the type of honor that is God ordained.

The Rembrandt painting *Return of the Prodigal* was instrumental in impacting a select group of students. One could theorize that the reason for that impact had to do with students identifying with the prodigal, his ridiculous squandering of resources and his sexual promiscuity. One could also conclude that a compassionate father figure was almost irresistible to some. There is little doubt that the sexually active college students who put their hearts out there in the survey are looking for a way to move out of shame and into the pursuit of meaningful honor. Further discussion, writing, and research may be able to flesh out a "fuller," more Eastern presentation of the gospel for a contingent of students who are otherwise riddled with shame – shame that causes them to withdrawal, attack themselves, attack others, and avoid the pain of being separated from the one who bore our shame on the cross.

A shame-to-honor gospel, which accentuates the honorific sense of a spiritual family, can provide a powerful sense of hope for a culture that is experiencing the deterioration of family and fatherhood. A community-minded Christian ministry among sexually active college students is essential. The community's acceptance of "lost" students can serve as a means of alleviating toxic shame. Evangelistic ministries must therefore differentiate between a toxic shame that causes people to hide and an

appropriate shame that draws people out of their loneliness into community. An honorific gospel highlights the honorific statements seen in the New Testament. People should see Christ as one who wishes to elevate people to a place of influence, purpose, calling, and responsibility through Christlikeness in life. Of course, we are all in need of forgiveness, for we are all sinners. Additionally, we all need to live within God's honorific family, where the Spirit of God is present to alleviate shame and bring honor to the honor-less.

## APPENDIX

### Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

Principal Investigator: Gary Hewins, Doctoral student, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Massachusetts

This questionnaire is designed to briefly explore your attitudes and behaviors regarding previous sexual experiences. In addition, there will be a few questions about spirituality and any religious beliefs you hold. Lastly, you will be asked to view four very brief videos on various topics. Please be assured that all of your responses will be anonymous. Do not type your name anywhere on the survey. In addition, the information will be kept strictly confidential. Any information you provide will be grouped with data from other participants to ensure anonymity. This questionnaire will take approximately 17 minutes to complete. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

**1. What is your age?**

- ☐ Under 18 years
- ☐ 18-22 years
- ☐ 23-28 years
- ☐ 29-35 years
- ☐ Over 35 years

**\* 2. Are you currently a student at a college or university?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**3. Find the category that best represents you.**

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Graduate student
- ☐ None of the above

**4. Which category best describes you?**

- ☐ I am a virgin (have not engaged in sexual intercourse)
- ☐ I have been sexually active on at least one occasion

**5. How many sexual partners have you had?**

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2 – 5
- ☐ 6 – 10
- ☐ 11 – 15
- ☐ 16 or more

**6. Find the category that best represents you:**

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Homosexual
- ☐ Bisexual

**7. What best represents your current religious or spiritual beliefs?**

- ☐ Christian (Catholic)
- ☐ Christian (Protestant)
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ I have no religious affiliation, but consider myself a spiritual person
- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Other

**8. To what degree do you consider yourself open to learning and discussing matters of faith?**

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Considerable
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

**9. To what degree are you devoted to your current religious faith?**

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Considerable
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

**10. How often do you pray?**

- ☐ Prayer is a major part of my life

- ☐ Prayer is a fairly regular part of my life
- ☐ I rarely pray
- ☐ I don't pray

**11. How often do you read religious Scripture?**

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Almost daily

The next group of questions address attitudes and behaviors regarding sexuality. Please answer them as honestly as possible. The survey is anonymous and confidential.

**12. To what extent do your beliefs affect your personal decisions regarding your sexuality?**

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Considerable
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

**13. To what extent do you experience anxiety or depression as it relates to sexual issues?**

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Considerable
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

**14. Have you ever been exposed to pornography?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ No

**15. At what age do you recall being exposed to pornography?**

- ☐ 8 years old or younger
- ☐ 9 – 12 years old
- ☐ 13 – 15 years old
- ☐ 16 – 17 years old
- ☐ 18 years or older
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Not applicable

**16. How often do you view pornography?**

- ☐ I don't view pornography
- ☐ Less than 1 hour per week
- ☐ Between 1-5 hours per week

- ☐ Between 6-20 hours per week  
☐ More than 20 hours per week

**17. Prior to the age of 18 years, I have been a victim of sexual abuse.**

- ☐ Yes ☐ Unsure ☐ No

**\* 18. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**19. I have had an unwanted pregnancy out of wedlock.**

- ☐ Yes ☐ Unsure ☐ No

**20. I have experience unwanted sex.**

- ☐ Yes, within the context of a "date rape"  
☐ Yes, not associated with "date rape"  
☐ Unsure  
☐ No

## Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

### Viewing the videos – The Return of the Prodigal – Video 1 of 4

You will now view four brief videos. After you view them, you will be asked to





complete some additional questions.

## Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

Depression and Faith – Video 2 of 4



## Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

Science, Logic, and the Bible – Video 3 of 4





### Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

Sexuality & Spirituality – Video 4 of 4



### Students Sexuality & Spirituality Survey

**21. Did you find the material in the videos informative?**

- ☐ Very informative  
☐ Somewhat informative  
☐ Not informative at all

**22. Did you find the material in the videos to be thought provoking?**

- ☐ Very thought provoking  
☐ Somewhat thought provoking  
☐ Not thought provoking at all

**23. Did you find the material in the videos to be inspirational?**

- ☐ Very inspirational  
☐ Somewhat inspirational  
☐ Not inspirational at all

**24. To what degree did the video on sexuality change your perception of God and sexuality & spirituality?**

- ☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**25. Do you see a relationship between your sexual behavior and your openness to the Gospel?**

- ☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**26. Could you see yourself benefiting by engaging in or hearing discussion regarding the important relationship between sexuality and spirituality?**

- ☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**27. Do you see how a growing faith in Christ will help alleviate or reduce any ongoing feelings of anxiety and depression you may experience?**

- ☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**28. Do you see the benefit in engaging in or hearing discussions regarding faith as it relates to your emotional well-being?**

- ☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**29. Did the video regarding "Science, Logic, and the Bible" in some way positively alter your personal view on the relevance of the Bible?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**30. Could you see yourself benefiting from having more information regarding the relationship between the sciences and the Bible?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**31. Did the video regarding Rembrandt's painting alter your perception of God?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**32. Could you personally identify with the prodigal and his emotional state?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**33. Did the Rembrandt video cause you to want to personally experience "coming home" to the heart of the Father?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**34. Were the videos effective in increasing your openness or curiosity to establish an intimate, meaningful, life-changing relationship with Christ?**

☐ Very much   ☐ Considerable   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ A little   ☐ Not at all

**35. Thanks for completing the survey. If you have watched all 4 of the videos, please enter your name and valid email address below to be entered in a drawing for the \$500.00 gift card.**

Name

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Email Address

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The questionnaire is finished.

Please note that to be entered in the drawing, you must have watched all 4 of the videos, in their entirety....and yes, we are pretty sure we can tell if you have watched the entire video. Your contact information will only be used

for the drawing, we will not sell, or use your information for any purpose other than the contest.

To view additional short videos from Pastor Gary Hewins on nearly every aspect of life, he invites you to visit: [www.lifepoints.org](http://www.lifepoints.org)

Thanks for taking this survey. We will notify the winner of the gift card as soon as the survey has been completed.

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## VITA

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Gary graduated from Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology and from Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia with a Master's of Arts Degree in Religion. After four years of doctoral studies Gary expects to graduate in May of 2016 from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton Massachusetts.

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The Pastoral Skills track of study at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary appealed to Gary because of its emphasis on pastors being effective practitioners of the gospel in ministry.